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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise and to you and through you announce His Excellency the Ambassador of Angola. His Excellency is here on his second visit to Alberta, and I had the pleasure of hosting him for lunch today. Angola has a lot of different things in common with Alberta, one of the largest ones being oil and gas as a country that produces 2 million barrels of oil per day. Our guests are in the Speaker's gallery. They are His Excellency Miguel Maria N'Zau Puna and his delegation. Could they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: His Excellency was also elected to his parliament in the last couple of months in his country and will be returning from Canada to go back home to serve as a parliamentarian in the country of Angola.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and certainly is an honour for me to be able to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an outstanding and distinguished employee of the government of the province of Alberta who with his wife, Sharon, is seated in your gallery. Assistant Deputy Minister Tim Grant is responsible for overseeing policy development and program implementation with the Department of Energy's electricity and alternative energy division.

Just two years ago, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Grant was more than 9,000 kilometres away commanding Canadian troops in the joint task force Afghanistan mission. A committed veteran of the Canadian armed forces, he has previously held positions of director of international operations, commander of Land Force Western Area, and deputy commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command. In his last assignment Mr. Grant served in Afghanistan as brigadier general assisting the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Privy Council Office in developing Canada's Afghanistan policy.

Mr. Speaker, for his commitment to this mission and to the Canadian armed forces he recently attracted some much-deserved recognition and will receive the Meritorious Service Cross from Governor General Michaëlle Jean for outstanding job performance during a mission. The Department of Energy, the province of Alberta, and our country are fortunate for the dedication and commitment of Tim Grant and of all the brave men and women who served or are currently serving with the Canadian armed forces.

I ask that they now rise, Mr. Speaker, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 60 guests seated in the public gallery. There are 52 grade 6 students from Edmonton public's Lago Lindo elementary school, which is in my constituency. These students are currently learning about government, which is part of the Alberta Education curriculum. The group is led by their teachers, Miss Carley Bowman and Mr. Kevin Peters, and parent helpers Edwin Hillyer, Vivian Adair, Monica Boyko, Cherie Spencer, Hala Cheikh, and Kevin Fricker. I would ask all the students, teachers, and parents to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to introduce two groups of people to you. I'd like to introduce first of all 14 students from the Lauderdale school in that marvellous constituency of Edmonton-Calder. Accompanying these students today are teacher Ms Marjorie Foth and her helper, who is also her mom, Mrs. Margaret Foth. Between these two ladies I think they absolutely prove the philosophy of the school, which is that staff are dedicated to the development of the whole child, that students share responsibility for their learning, and parents are supportive and involved. I'd ask everyone to give them the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

My second introduction this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you is two people from the Alberta Forest Products Association. They're seated in the members' gallery over here. The first person is the director of health, safety, and transportation, Mrs. Carola Von Sass. Carola is, of course, the leader of the AFP's partnerships in injury reduction program. This is a health and safety initiative between industry, the WCB, and occupational health and safety. Carola administers this program for industry. The second person I'd like to introduce is someone who virtually needs no introduction, but I will anyway, and that is Mr. Brady Whittaker, the president and chief executive officer of the Alberta Forest Products Association. Now, as some of you may know, Brady joined the AFPA on January 15 of 2008 and has a significant history in the Whitecourt area, both in forest products and in a number of other private-sector initiatives. I'm pleased to report that both Carola and Brady will be demonstrating their legendary curling prowess at the Calder classic on Saturday. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to introduce students to the Assembly, but today it's a special pleasure because these students are from a school that has over the years produced a number of MLAs, including the Member for Edmonton-Centre, a former Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and myself. So there we go. It's McKernan elementary junior high. There are two classes here today, one from the English program and one from the French immersion program. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Ennis and Mrs. Vachon. I would ask both groups to rise. One is in the public gallery, and I think the other is in the members' gallery. Please, all MLAs, give them a warm reception. They are our future.

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 Legislature 25 very special guests. They are all employees of the province of Alberta. They are all members of the Public Affairs Bureau and work very hard on behalf of all Albertans. They are seated in both galleries. They are Tracy Collins, Sheila Dorosh, Lisanne Lewis, Rosemary Austen, Alison Gurnham, Jessica Spratt, Karen Karbasheski, Kathleen Range, Joel Belizario, Ogho Ikhala, Erin Reddekopp, Natasha McKenzie, Lindsey Lubkey, Sharron Bursey, Val Taylor, Kathy Kiel, Arthur McComish, and also somebody that I thought I recognized as we were taking a picture, a neighbour, Camille Weleschuk. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a large group: the executive members of Sikh temple, the Sikh Federation of Edmonton Hindu mandirs, and the Punjabi Media Association of Alberta. They all have worked so hard to engage the community to fund raise for the Edmonton food bank, which I will detail later in my member's statement. I would like to ask the members sitting in your gallery to please rise when I call their names: Mr. Baljinder Singh Sandhu, Mr. Gurcharn Singh Sangha, Mr. Darshan Singh Gill, Mr. Nirmal Singh Bhui, Mr. Parmjit Singh Ubhi, Mr. Inderjit Singh Gill, Mr. Harpreet Singh Sandhu, Dr. P.R. Kalia, Mr. Gurbhalinder Singh Sandhu, Mr. Ranjit Singh Powar, Mr. Harjit Singh Sandhu, Mr. Autat Singh Thind. Sitting in the public gallery I've got four members: Raghbir Singh Dhaliwal, Mr. Amerjit Singh Purewal, Mr. Gurnam Singh Dodd, Mr. Sukhdev Singh Dhillon. Please, all members of this House, join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all my colleagues in the House one of my constituents, a unique, special, and courageous young lady who has recently experienced some miracles in her life. Lauren Smith was born with cystic fibrosis. Cystic fibrosis is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting young Canadians, and in Lauren's short life of 18 years she has struggled long and hard with this disease, spending many months in hospital. In August, while in hospital in Calgary, her lungs collapsed, and she was airlifted to Edmonton comatose and in critical need of a lung transplant. Miraculously, on August 15 a donor lung became available, and now a few weeks later Lauren is completely free from the disease of CF and well on the way to recovery, a living testament to our Premier's priorities in a province that puts patients first, has world-class health facilities, and the right health services when needed.

Mr. Speaker, Lauren is seated in the members' gallery today and is accompanied by her mother, Shauna, and my beautiful wife, Linda. I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great honour and pride today that I stand up to introduce to you and through you to the

members of this House one of my brothers, Kent Fawcett. Kent just recently returned from a year and a half of working over in London as an architectural technologist for a company called Benoy. He has recently come back to Canada and has accepted a position with CEI architects in Vancouver, so he's just here in Alberta for a couple of weeks. I want to wish him all the success in his new endeavours. I hope the members can join me in giving him the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: And you're not going to tell us which one of the two your mother loves best?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three special guests seated in the members' gallery today: Ms Agnes Roh, CEO of YWA, from Vancouver, B.C.; Miss Anna Hong, vice-president of YWA, from the Philippines; and Ms Acela Quibrantar, president of YWA, from the Philippines as well. Yesterday we had the privilege of meeting the Minister of Employment and Immigration to discuss matters regarding illegal recruitment fees and Alberta employment standards for foreign workers. This morning the group met with my hon. colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to talk about a number of issues concerning foreign workers in Fort McMurray, Alberta. I would like to ask the group to rise today and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, for my second introduction it is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Miss Anu Gosavi, president of the Jhankaar Society for the Music and Dance of India. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark joined Miss Gosavi and myself for lunch today. We discussed many issues concerning the Jhankaar Society for the Music and Dance of India and relevant issues concerning my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. I would like to ask Miss Anu Gosavi to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a good friend of mine who I don't get a chance to visit with very often, Rob Smith. I first met Rob in Sydney, Australia, after he had recruited me from Camrose to go to Sydney to play in and coach the Super League down there, where he was the coaching director. He was kind of a Reg Dunlop, a well-known player-coach. He has been involved in hockey for many years, including advanced scouting for the Winnipeg Jets. He now lives in Edmonton, where he is still recruiting people and temporary foreign workers to come work on projects here in Alberta. I don't see him, but I know he's here. I'd ask Rob to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three members of the Western Carnival Development Association, known as Cariwest. Cariwest celebrates the culture of the Caribbean community through music, steel pan, calypso, and a display of

costumes that depict themes chosen by the groups participating in the parade. Cariwest will be celebrating 25 years of providing fun and entertainment to the citizens of Edmonton in 2009. Cariwest is a nonprofit, volunteer-run organization that puts on the annual Edmonton Cariwest festival each August. This year I had the honour of participating as a judge of the combined costume extravaganza and parade competition, and I can tell you that these are very, very colourful costumes. I think that they would add a bit of colour to your procession each day in the Assembly. With us today in the members' gallery are board members Gil Weekes, Indira Ramper-saud, and Annamaria Edwards. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Sunday was United Nations International Day of Tolerance, a day that recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly six members from the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. Now, the ISCWR, informally known as the court, has been promoting and building awareness and acceptance of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered community while raising tens of thousands of dollars each year in support of local charities which provide services to or foster accepting attitudes of the GLBT community. The Edmonton court consists of an empress and emperor who are elected by members of the community and act as figureheads of the organization and goodwill ambassadors in the community, spearheading charitable fundraising efforts and representing the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta throughout North America.

I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names: Dale Newby; Doug Salahub; Antonio Bavaro; Barry Woodroff; Dale Krasowski, a.k.a His Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty Emperor XXXIII Sundance Lonestar; and Marcel Panas, a.k.a. Her Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty Empress XXXIII Marni Gras. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we all now offer the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to add a couple of comments about one special guest in this audience today who is a good friend of mine. His name is Rob Ennis. We grew up playing basketball in our youth and won city championships together. I had the honour of having him coach my son, and they won the city championships last year. Again, if my good friend Rob Ennis would stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House. Thank you so much.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Savings Strategy

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mintz report, finally released today, paints a chilling picture of Alberta's future if this government doesn't start a disciplined savings plan. The report is clear: either we save for the future or this province faces a 40 per cent tax hike. The solution is to do what the Alberta Liberals have been proposing for years and put a fixed proportion of resource revenue into a savings plan. My question is to the Premier. Given

that the government received this report in January 2008, why did this Premier conceal the report during the election campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's funny. One thing that the Liberals didn't conceal during their campaign was a savings plan but also spending \$7 billion at the same time. You would really have to pull a rabbit out of the hat to do that.

With respect to Dr. Mintz's report he's worked very hard with the commission on it. We definitely will use that report in building our savings strategy. The reason, of course, that we released it today is that the report was delivered just before the election. We went through the election campaign, new MLAs. We studied the report. Most importantly, over the last six weeks there has been a considerable amount of financial turmoil around the world.

Dr. Taft: Well, the Mintz report on page 3 warns that Alberta in the future could be a ghost town if we don't start building up our savings. This government has had the report for almost a year, yet we're actually watching government savings rates shrink. To the Premier: given the dying future described in this report, why weren't the Mintz report's warnings enough to cause immediate action?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the last number of years this government has done the following: paid off just about \$23 billion worth of debt, a heritage savings fund of about \$16 billion, has set aside \$7.7 billion into a sustainability fund to cushion the drop in resource revenue, has set aside \$4 billion for carbon capture and storage and for green transit, and also has a \$22.2 billion capital fund, which is about \$75 billion in total.

Dr. Taft: As anyone who saves for retirement knows, the longer you wait, the harder it will be to contribute enough each year to reach your goal. This report makes it clear that this government is running out of time on this file. Will the Premier – straight, please – commit to putting a savings plan similar to the one in the Mintz report into the next budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to a savings plan – we mentioned that in the last campaign – and also instructions to the minister of finance to put the plan together. But I will say that these last number of weeks have brought about a completely different situation around the world. We're going to have to monitor that very carefully. I can tell you that even today listening to the throne speech, where our Prime Minister is talking about deficits, we're not going to slide into deficits. We're going to keep balanced budgets, and we're not going to create deficits in order to save.

Oh, by the way, the province of Alberta, I can assure you, is not retiring.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After 10 months of hiding it, the government has finally decided to let the public see the Mintz report, and it tells the government exactly what Alberta Liberals have been saying: save now. The minister of finance admitted that there are divisions within the Tory caucus. The Treasury Board still hasn't been approached, and some ministers still need to be briefed. Obviously, savings is not a priority for all members of this government. My question is to the Premier. What is the Premier doing to convince his divided caucus to prioritize savings and implement the Mintz report?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can assure all Albertans that even though we have a very large caucus of 72 members, considerably larger after the last election, we are united. I can assure you that this province is going to take a leadership role within Canada to ensure that we are globally competitive, ensure that we have job protection in place to keep growing the jobs. Also, Alberta's economy will continue to support the rest of Canada's economy. We have a lot of weight on our shoulders, more than the Liberals ever would imagine.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. To the minister of finance: given that cabinet hasn't even decided if they want to save or spend their way into a 40 per cent tax hike, can the minister explain what the government has against a savings plan? Why won't you save?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, let's look at the record. Since 2004, when we paid off the debt, we've put \$6.7 billion into the heritage fund and other endowments – \$6.7 billion since 2004. We've also added, as the Premier noted, \$7.7 billion for the sustainability fund. That's savings of over \$14 billion. This crew is all about saving, and they're not all about spending. That's why we're taking our time to do it right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Back to the same minister, then. Is she saying that the Mintz report is wrong to recommend savings now? Because they also warn that if you don't do it now, you'll be facing a 40 per cent tax hike.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I wish I could just capture everybody and take them in a time capsule back to that press release this morning when Dr. Mintz spoke in front of the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and said that he knows it takes time. He said that when he's done previous reports, it has taken up to two years. He said that time was not the important thing. I think he really inferred that it was getting it right; he was not disappointed at all that it has taken this amount of time to release his report.

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

Lottery Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, instead of putting money in a piggy bank, this government has been putting it in a pork barrel, and the tenderloin of that pork is lottery funds. The list of lottery funds that was read out the other day by the Premier was actually tabled last month by the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. The tabling lists opposition constituencies as nongovernmental. My question is to the Premier. If lottery funds aren't allocated based on partisan politics, then why do lottery officials divide grant allocations into government and nongovernment constituencies?

Mr. Stelmach: The division, of course, is done so that the Liberals could understand the program.

You know, this has come up a number of times in the House, and I guess there's a bit of a struggle here. If the opposition does not support the lottery program, if they think that their constituents don't support the lottery program, tell us in this House in full public, in front of the camera. Say so, and then we'll make changes. But if you do support it, then continue working with the Alberta govern-

ment, especially with the officials in the lottery program, to ensure that it's fair and to support the many charitable organizations that actually depend on this program to sustain them.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier well knows, we support community lottery boards.

Last year it was apparently too much to ask the government to adopt a savings strategy, but it wasn't too much for the government to abuse the public purse, pouring lottery funds into everything from golf courses to \$50 million a year to horse racing. Will the Premier admit that funding for lottery grants was jacked up by more than \$170 million last year because Tory MLAs wanted to play politics with the public purse in the lead-up to the election?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what he's referring to. If he's referring to the major facilities lottery program, that was the program that was instituted to catch up with much of the badly needed infrastructure in the communities. If he doesn't support the program, send back the \$10 million that you got for the Go centre. I know that there are other organizations who will gladly accept it.

Dr. Taft: Well, my question to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: will this minister just end the charade, show some integrity, and just admit that this government won't reinstate community lottery boards because Tory MLAs want to continue their special treatment when it comes to handing out lottery grants? Just admit the obvious.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, to admit the obvious, obviously the Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand. We have 3.5 million people in this province. We have a shortage of infrastructure. We have needs for all of our social service agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and community groups. Whether it's Meals on Wheels, seniors, disadvantaged people, drug and alcohol addiction, they are getting it through this program. There are hundreds of organizations in this province that benefit from this program. We believe in making stronger and safer communities.

If you don't agree with it, that's your problem. That's why you're in opposition; we're in government. Thank you.

Syncrude Royalty Agreement

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I thought they weren't going to do that anymore.

Yesterday the Premier announced a pathetic royalty deal for the people of Alberta. In January Syncrude will begin paying royalties based on the price of bitumen instead of synthetic crude. That means that Alberta will get about 50 per cent of what we're getting today on every barrel. Then thanks to this deal we'll get not 50 per cent but 55 per cent. Way to go, Mr. Premier. I want to ask the Premier how he could let Albertans down like this.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is another example of the opposition leader not understanding not only the agreement but the process that was followed. If it wasn't for this government calling for a total review of the royalty framework and sitting down with the companies that already had Crown agreements – remember, they had Crown agreements expiring in 2015. These two companies, Suncor and Syncrude, came to the table and renewed them without going to court. Syncrude alone will be paying close to \$2 billion between now and 2015. That's \$2 billion more than they would have been paying under the old agreement.

So where this guy is coming from with a 55 per cent royalty is way off the mark.

Mr. Mason: The Premier is just blowing smoke. His own news release talks about an additional 900 and some million dollars, with an M, over a seven-year period. Now there's going to be a considerable drop in the revenues, which his own task force on royalties stated. That's one of the reasons this government is heading for a big spending problem. I want to ask the Premier how he can justify getting 55 per cent of what we're getting today on the Syncrude royalty.

Mr. Stelmach: I guess the next time we put out a media release, we'll try and put it in one paragraph so that he can read, you know, all of the information in the first paragraph and know exactly what the arrangement is.

This is I think another example of the two companies coming forward. Mind you, they did have, as I said, Crown agreements. They came to the table voluntarily and renewed those agreements. I think it speaks a lot for the corporate citizenship of the companies and also for the tenacity of the Minister of Energy and for the government in working through and establishing a new royalty framework.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Syncrude took this Premier to the cleaners.

The Mintz report says that we need to focus on savings, and in the future we will not be able to rely on natural resource revenue. Norway's savings fund is approximately \$400 billion, 25 times the size of our heritage trust fund, and they did that by establishing a royalty regime that would have generated \$5.7 billion per year in this province if we had Norway's royalties. So I want to ask the question: why has this Premier failed to provide for the people and the children of this province in the future by letting the oil companies take almost . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thanks for giving him a little bit more time to ramble on about Norway. Norway operates as a nationalized oil company, and they farm it out, contract it out to Statoil. Okay? So the operation is thus: the company is the country. What he's actually saying is that he wants us to nationalize all of the oil companies that operate in Canada, so we would nationalize everything.

Secondly, what he's asking us to do is to actually put in a sales tax of 25 per cent, because that's what Norway has, plus an income tax rate of 44.5 per cent. Really, what he hasn't said is that actually that's the level of taxation he wants to impose on Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you've got a point of order you want to raise later?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. You've got a point of order identified.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Groundwater Quality

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Increased population, industrial growth, and the closure of the South Saskatchewan River basin to new surface water licences have increased pressure on the

importance of that area's groundwater supplies. My question is to the Minister of Environment. How does the renewed Water for Life strategy help protect Alberta's groundwater resources in light of these new pressures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we announced that we have in fact renewed the Water for Life strategy. There is some valuable work that has begun under the Water for Life strategy with respect to groundwater. We're working with the Alberta Geological Survey on groundwater mapping. I've talked in this House before about our airborne geophysics program and water-well sample drilling program along the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. Over the past three years we've spent \$16 million to construct over 200 monitoring wells to understand that very issue of groundwater.

Mr. Marz: My first supplemental is to the same minister. What is the government doing to mitigate the potential effects of industrial activity on the groundwater in that area?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, knowledge of the groundwater system is critical so that we can ensure that we protect that very valuable groundwater system. There are really two aspects to it. One aspect is the very rigid environmental regulatory regime that we maintain with respect to any kind of underground activity and its possible connection with groundwater. The other, frankly, is very important, and that is educating individuals and owners of wells to ensure that they maintain those wells adequately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental is to the same minister. Water quality in Alberta's oil sands is of significant concern to Albertans. What is the government doing to ensure that groundwater quality in this area is being protected?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in a very similar manner to what we are doing in southern Alberta in the oil sands region, we have put in place and, in fact, have greatly enhanced our regional groundwater quality assessment program. Just this year we completed the design and have begun implementation of an enhancement to that program, which includes additional well monitoring facilities. The groundwater management framework is designed to guide stewardship of water in the oil sands and will improve our ability to implement the cumulative impacts regulatory regime for environmental protection.

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

2:10 Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the minister of labour. In the event of a work shortage here in Alberta does the government have rules to determine who is laid off first at a job site? Is it landed immigrants, is it Canadian citizens, or is it temporary foreign workers?

The Speaker: That should be the Minister of Employment and Immigration, I believe.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our priority, naturally, is Albertans and to make sure that any Albertans that have

the desire to work and the willingness to work have opportunities for that. We don't make any distinction, though, once individuals are in this particular province as to whether individuals have a priority on jobs or job selection. That choice is up to the employers themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That response certainly is interesting.

To the same minister: given the recent economic downturn that has unfortunately occurred, will the government cancel the temporary foreign worker program now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not our intent to cancel the temporary foreign worker program. We've had at any one time over the last year between 30,000 and 35,000 temporary foreign workers in the province of Alberta. What we're seeing happen now is that some of the individuals are not necessarily renewing their contract. Where at one time they were using 10 or 15 temporary foreign workers on sites, when those are coming up for renewal or to reapply, they are coming back and saying: we only need a few of them rather than that many. So employers themselves are cutting back on the numbers under the temporary foreign worker program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why can we not allow the temporary foreign workers who are here now to work to the period that their visa states and cancel the program to protect the jobs of the landed immigrants who are here now and the Canadian citizens?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program was meant to do exactly that. It's a temporary program to fill in positions and provide the necessary functions or services that employers require in the province. The temporary foreign worker numbers are very volatile. As demand increases, our numbers naturally go up, and as demand decreases, then it's intended to slow the process down. That's the whole idea behind the temporary foreign worker program.

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

Water for Life Strategy

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government of Alberta announced its renewal of the Alberta Water for Life strategy, which was released five years ago. My questions are all for the Minister of Environment. Why has this government rewritten what was recognized as one of North America's most comprehensive water management strategies?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to make it clear that there was no rewriting of the strategy. This is a renewal of the strategy, a very excellent strategy, and the member has correctly pointed out that this is something that is recognized as leading edge around the world. We have had in the last five years, since this strategy was implemented, some significant changes. We've had

dramatic increases in populations. We've had the closure of a major water system. So it was important to renew the strategy.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, in the original Water for Life strategy partnerships of stakeholders in watershed and advisory councils and stewardship groups were considered the primary means for achieving the strategy's goals. Will the minister assure Albertans that the renewed Water for Life strategy will follow the same design and make stakeholder input a key part of the strategy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can absolutely assure the member that that's the case. In fact, partnerships are the key to the success of this program. This evening in Calgary I will be celebrating with our partners, some 200-plus, at a dinner celebrating the five-year anniversary of this program. As a result of this program, we've created the Alberta Water Council. Nine watershed groups are already up and running, two more are under construction, and 140 different watershed stewardship groups have been operating on a voluntary basis throughout the province of Alberta. That's the reason why this program has been as successful as it is.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the House what has been accomplished in the five years since the Water for Life strategy was implemented?

Mr. Renner: Well, without wanting to read an extensive list – and believe me, Mr. Speaker, it is very extensive – let me just highlight some of the accomplishments. One that we've talked about in this House a lot is the South Saskatchewan River basin water management plan. We've had an increased drinking water facility assessment, online information that's now available, regional pipeline systems throughout the province, not to mention the fact, as I mentioned before, the formation of the Water Council, the watershed planning and advisory councils, and the involvement of all the stewardship groups.

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

Alberta Health Services Board

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health last April, unfortunately, fired the regional health authorities and replaced them with the Alberta Health Services Board. At the meeting last week of the Alberta Health Services Board in their new, swank headquarters in downtown Edmonton a decision was made to develop conflict-of-interest and code-of-conduct rules. My first question is to the minister of health. What conflict-of-interest and code-of-conduct rules has the Alberta Health Services Board used for the last six months?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board has been working hard to establish its various rules of conduct. I don't know off the top of my head exactly what they've been operating under, but I can tell you that we have seven very dedicated Albertans who have committed to governance of Alberta health care in this province, and I can assure you that these individuals are ones where if there was any issue around conflict of interest, it would be declared. If this member has anything that he would like to raise in this House, I ask him to do so.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why are permanent conflict-of-interest and code-of-conduct rules for the Alberta Health

Services Board only being developed now? Why weren't they ready when you initially fired the regional health authorities and replaced them with this outfit?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think I just answered that, Mr. Speaker. First of all, when any person that is appointed by this particular government sits on a board, they understand that if there's a conflict of interest, they would declare it. I'm not sure what the member is driving at, but if he has some particular area of concern, I would ask him to raise it rather than just sort of tossing out these allegations.

Mr. MacDonald: These aren't allegations, and the minister knows it.

Now, again to the minister: are there any senior staff of the Alberta Health Services Board with a private contractual interest with the board to provide insured surgical services to the board now or at a future date?

Mr. Liepert: I don't know that off the top of my head, but I suspect not, Mr. Speaker.

You know, speaking of knows, with this particular member it's a good thing that we have a very short session because his nose grows a little bit longer every day when he's in this House. I would like to clarify something that he raised yesterday – and he alluded to it again today – about moving into posh, new offices. Well, Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. A couple of administrative staff of Alberta Health Services have moved into the former offices of the Alberta Mental Health Board. It is space that we already through Alberta Health Services have a lease for, and what it has resulted in is the ability to open up additional space at the University hospital for patient care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Environmental Spills

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment has put together a number of special spill response units, and these are known as the Alberta environment support and emergency response team, also known as ASERT. Now, Alberta Environment has stationed six of these spill units around rural Alberta, one of them in my constituency in the town of Ponoka. The question to the Minister of Environment is: by putting these response units into these rural areas, has the government transferred the responsibility and obligation of cleaning the spill areas to municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. In fact, ASERT still is committed to working with municipalities and their emergency response teams. What these units are designed for is to ensure that we have a faster response time and that communities are safer. The mobile units will minimize the impact through mitigating the spill, managing a spill, controlling any spill, and preventing the impact to environment and infrastructure from not addressing them as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister my next question is: does this program change the responsibility of industries to report these spills?

Mr. Renner: No, Mr. Speaker. It's very clear that the regulatory

requirements remain in effect, and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires the reporting of any kinds of spills. I want to make it absolutely clear that it is the responsibility of the polluter to clean up and to pay for the costs of cleanup of any of these spills.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister is: will the government ensure that these communities are able to respond and actually use this equipment when they need to have it?

Mr. Renner: Now, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker, because it doesn't do any good to put wonderful equipment out in the field and then not provide adequate training on how to use it. There is a program that ASERT has put into place that provides training for such things as hazard assessment and on-scene cleanup, equipment familiarization, and the list goes on. Let me just say that this is a program that provides equipment that can be readily available at locations throughout the province and appropriate training for the first responders to use it.

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

Homelessness

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary, Lethbridge, and Edmonton all experienced record-breaking increases in their homeless populations this year. Almost a full year into the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness, it continues to increase throughout the province at alarming rates. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: given the dramatic rise in homelessness will this government admit that it was wrong in causing market inflation with direct rent supplements instead of committing to real solutions such as temporary rent caps and stricter guidelines for condo conversions, solutions recommended by the publicly released Affordable Housing Task Force report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Calgary and Lethbridge have released their recent homeless counts, and I haven't seen Edmonton's yet although the member has addressed that here today. I am looking forward to that count. As I had mentioned to you before, I did have an opportunity to go with the Edmonton team. There were 200 volunteers that were out counting the homeless about three weeks ago. I am meeting tonight with the executive director of Homeward Trust, Susan McGee, who was the head of the 200 volunteers, and I can bring that back to the Assembly in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate for the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness is to provide a 10-year plan, due this fall. Can the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs say exactly when the secretariat will release the probably now nine-year plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The secretariat has been working hard over the past several months on putting together a plan that's principled for the homeless. It will be a strategy that we will review as a government when that plan is submitted along with recommendations, and of course the first principle will be to provide permanent homes for all Albertans that are safe, secure, sustainable, and, when necessary, barrier free and along with that addressing the root causes of homelessness. When that comes forward, I will bring that through the right process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. What steps is the minister taking to encourage the private sector to invest in creating affordable housing in Alberta cities now given these tough economic times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year, with the requests for proposals for affordable housing, as you know, we have \$142 million that we asked the community to submit proposals for, and that is for the municipalities as well as nonprofit groups and, importantly, for the private sector, which is what your question is about. We have received 145 proposals for the \$142 million. We will be reviewing those within the next two weeks, and at that time we'll announce the private sector's commitment. It's important that you know that we as government will have a 70 per cent commitment for the development of the housing, and the private sector would be 30 per cent.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week I attended the opening of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the U of A. This is a first in the country, and we should be proud. I also want to note a government of Alberta web page dedicated to understanding and stopping homophobic bullying. Obviously, certain ministers in government understand that homophobia equals discrimination and is wrong. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: isn't it time to move that acknowledgement from a website and put it into legislation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many ways I can say it. I've said it so many times. Maybe I'll say it in language that they understand: nyet.

Ms Notley: Well, that was great.

I was pleased to learn that Camp fyrefly, a camp for sexual-minority youth, received funding from the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and – wait for it – I'd like to commend the minister for funding an organization that is committed to stopping oppression and marginalization and helping youth find strength through times of cruelty. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: given that this government acknowledges that children deserve a kids camp free of homophobia, doesn't he also believe they deserve a province free of homophobia?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times we have to say it. We have a province where we have a Human Rights and Citizenship Commission that states through the Supreme Court

judgment that people that are gay or lesbian will not be discriminated against. If they want to go and lodge a complaint before the commission, they are free to do so. Our website, all our documentation states that they are free to do so, and we will operate in a province free of discrimination against people on the basis of racial discrimination. We are going through a review, as I've mentioned umpteen times in this House. When we get through the review . . .

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On one hand we tell kids to expect equality on the basis of sexual orientation, yet on the other this minister will not act to stop the inherent slap in the face which is the absence of that protection from the human rights code. Now, I would like to commend the Minister of Education, though, for combating homophobia in secondary schools through the safe and caring schools initiative. To the minister of culture. At least some of the cabinet understands that homophobia does not belong in schools. Shouldn't we be willing to hold the rest of society and the rest of us to the same standard?

Mr. Blackett: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? In our party we have one native, we have four Sikhs, we have two Chinese, we have two Caribbeans, and we have somebody from the Philippines. We understand diversity. We understand it for all. We have a multicultural education fund that goes out and helps educate. We fund organizations, including gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered individuals, on education of their rights and promoting equality for all Albertans.

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

International Financial Crisis

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's second-quarter fiscal update was certainly a reality check for many Albertans. The reality is that we are not immune from the global economic trends and events of the last several months. The check is: what has this government done and is planning to do to ensure that the opportunities we have come to enjoy here in Alberta are impacted as little as possible by the current economic crisis? Can the Minister of Finance and Enterprise advise this House on the plan this government has in place to navigate the current global economic storm?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been debt free and better able than any other jurisdiction to weather the crisis. Our Premier's economic council will be establishing a broad range of strategies that will help us in the future relative to economic policy. We have a value-added strategy that my ministry's enterprise division has been working on for petrochemicals. We have a comprehensive strategy for energy that the Minister of Energy and the Deputy Premier are bringing forward in the weeks ahead. An initiative like our recent announcement of the bitumen royalty-in-kind strategy is the very thing that will unlock the possibilities for expanded petrochemical development in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's announcement

has also shown how fickle resource revenue can be even in just one fiscal quarter. Does this minister have a plan that will reduce our province's reliance on such a volatile revenue source?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our ministry is responsible for working on productivity and competitiveness, and we are working on those strategies along with meetings that we've had with other provinces on the productivity side. We have also got industries that many people aren't aware of, like the environmental technologies, like aerospace, which is burgeoning in southern Alberta, like biomedical devices, industrial equipment, engineering, research and development in health and nanotechnology. We're seeing increased investments in alternative strategies for energy. These are some of the things we are doing to expand the opportunities for Albertans.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's surplus policy has served the province well in times of great economic prosperity, allowing the government to save some and build and maintain the roads, schools, and hospitals demanded by Albertans. To the President of the Treasury Board: with what is left of this year's surplus going towards very important but costly initiatives of CCS and Green TRIP public transit, what is the President of the Treasury Board going to do to ensure that funding is available to build and maintain our infrastructure as set out in the government's 20-year capital plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer, could I say congratulations to my mom and dad, who are at home watching and celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary today.

Mr. Speaker, the savings and investment strategy in Alberta has to be based on the fact that most Albertans, certainly the ones I represent, want a province where they can work and raise their families and have an income and not count on a bunch of money in a bank somewhere to live off sometime down the road when apparently it might rain. We are going to build the infrastructure drivers – the roads, the bridges, technical institutes, and colleges – that will allow Albertans to be a part of a knowledge-based economy, that will allow them to get back and forth from work and be proud of the great infrastructure we built and that is funded three years out.

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

Farm Worker Safety

Ms Pastoor: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was distracted by the vision of our little baby boy Lloyd.

Mr. Speaker, this issue remains very important to this side of the House. This government has failed to protect farm workers working in either large or small operations, yet they state that you cannot legislate common sense. I find that quite contradictory as there's an entirely legislated act devoted to protecting workers, known as the Occupational Health and Safety Act. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why . . .

Mr. Goudreau: I don't understand the question.

The Speaker: Then, the hon. member can proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Let me rephrase. I wanted to know the difference between the contradiction in saying that you can't legislate common sense, but in fact there is an act that is to protect all workers. Farm workers are not protected under that. Why the contradiction?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've always said that the farms and ranches operate under a totally different schedule than most operations work under. They don't work in a traditional 9 to 5 job, or they hire individuals at different times of the year to meet their requirements. We're very, very sensitive to the traditional use of farms and their workers, and we're respecting that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Mushroom workers are protected.

When will he take action to fully include all farm-hired staff under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and correct the failures of the government and the minister of agriculture?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, when we do some of the work and talk with the farm families, there are many of them who are aware that they can get coverage under WCB, and a lot of individuals opt to take the optional WCB coverage. So there is some protection that's available for farm workers if the employers and employees make that arrangement between themselves. On that basis, we don't anticipate any immediate changes. We still believe in education and some of the work that . . .

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

Strategic Oil and Gas Reserves

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Strategic oil reserves have been employed in some jurisdictions to offset emergency situations and mitigate potential supply disruptions. My first question is for the Minister of Energy. Is there any merit in creating a provincial strategic reserve for oil and gas or transport fuels in Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, the opportunities that people take to have strategic reserves would be in jurisdictions where they import their oil and gas. Alberta, of course, is not in that situation, so a strategic reserve with respect to oil and gas for Alberta would clearly not be necessary. We do have a lot of oil and gas in the province. Transportation fuel may be another topic.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Many of my constituents have asked about the implications of our bitumen royalty-in-kind policy and the potential for value-added products in Alberta. Could the minister briefly explain what this policy would mean and what the timelines are for decisions on awarding bitumen royalty-in-kind?

Mr. Knight: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. With respect to the timeline first, of course, the hon. member and all members of the Assembly will know that we've made statements with respect to the new royalty framework. Bitumen royalty-in-kind is part of that implementation date of January 1, 2009, and then the regulatory arrangements behind bitumen royalty-in-kind and other parts of that particular framework will come into effect in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. In light of the fact that a vast majority of the commodities from Alberta are exported to one customer, which leaves us vulnerable, in what ways can we further promote Alberta's oil and gas to Asian and other markets to diversify our customer base?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that question is at the basis of a lot of work that's being done now in Alberta by Alberta companies and certainly by the government of the province of Alberta. Interesting to note that bitumen from Alberta already reaches offshore markets through the port of Vancouver in certain circumstances. Small amounts, but it still happens. We have a project proposed by one of the pipeline operators in the west, the Gateway project to move bitumen to the west coast and put it on tidewater. We think that that's a very good project and support such enterprise.

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

Climate Change

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier desperately clutches his greenwashing campaign of denial, other jurisdictions continue to adopt measures that make Alberta's climate change plan ridiculously obsolete in the eyes of the world. The President-elect in the U.S. has stated that he'll move quickly to adopt national greenhouse gas emission caps, very stringent caps. Alberta's current plan is totally inadequate. To the Minister of the Environment. The President-elect's plan calls for reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80 per cent by 2050. Alberta's plan lets emissions rise to 2020 and then a reduction of 14 per cent.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the opportunity to work with the new administration in the United States. I think we're all looking to achieve the same outcomes, and those outcomes are to reduce the emissions of CO₂. We have a plan in place that's based upon real and existing technology, and I look forward to having a further discussion with the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be looking forward to how the minister plans to restore Alberta's tarnished reputation in the eyes of the world.

The President-elect has stated clearly that he will quickly bring in a cap and trade system nationally. Given that the Premier has dismissed the notion of cap and trade previously, will the minister urge him to reconsider entering into such a system with our biggest trading partner to send a message that Alberta is serious about reducing emissions, or is the plan all offshore?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I will not urge the Premier to change Alberta's position. Alberta is committed to reducing our emissions in Alberta, not by buying swampland in Florida but by reducing emissions in Alberta, and to do that, we need to invest in the technology. We need to keep the funds in Alberta. That's why we have the only legislation of its kind in North America that requires large industrial emitters to do just that.

Mr. Chase: This government has turned our boreal forest into a northern swampland itself. You want to buy? Buy local.

While the global economy is undergoing dramatic challenges, this delusional government with its head buried in the tar sands acts as though everything is fine. The first step toward healing is admitting when you have a problem. Barack Obama's energy plan calls for 10 per cent of electricity to come from nonrenewable sources by 2010 and 25 per cent by 2025. What is this government doing to demonstrate our . . .

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that an important part of our plan is for alternative forms of energy, to encourage alternative forms of energy. In fact, Alberta already has the largest wind farms in Canada, and once we get an opportunity to enhance the transmission grid in the province, there's no reason to believe we won't be increasing that significantly. So those kinds of numbers are completely appropriate and something that we could strive for as well.

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

2:40

Diversity and Tolerance

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Sunday the International Day of Tolerance was marked by bringing awareness to issues of prejudice and intolerance. In the past I've heard criticisms of this government, suggesting that only lip service is paid in these respects. [interjections] I have heard those criticisms. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What tangible efforts have been made on the issues of intolerance and prejudice in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, in 1996 the United Nations declared November 16 International Day of Tolerance. In our government we believe in tolerance and inclusiveness and openness for all members, all participants, all citizens of Alberta. We have the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund, that I mentioned, that supports programs that promote respect, diversity, and equality, prevent discrimination and racism, and build welcoming communities and workplaces.

Mr. Rodney: I appreciate that response, but I do have another question for the same minister. As the government member officially responsible for human rights, the question could be: what have you done lately to keep up with the ever-changing realities of modern-day Alberta to ensure that diversity and dynamism don't break the province apart and we actually build upon it here in Alberta?

Mr. Blackett: Well, we do a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, through the education fund that I mentioned. We go around the province, and we meet with different groups. I've gone around the province myself and met with many different groups, whether they're ethnic groups, people in different locations in the province, and even the gay and the lesbian organizations that the hon. members across the way so repeatedly want to remind me of. We will continue to speak loudly and forcefully for the fair rights of all Albertans and against discrimination.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker, and hon. members. I do trust that that will finally answer some of the questions that have been raised, but it seems like a lot of work within the department. I would ask the same minister: what has he done to go beyond the department because the truth is that this is an issue that goes beyond simply Culture and Community Spirit and, really, transcends to other ministries as well?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely right. This issue does transcend other departments, whether it's the Minister of Justice talking about the different laws and regulations that we have, how they're interpreted and how they could be improved possibly. It's the Minister of Employment and Immigration talking about how we make sure that our programs work better to educate employers and to allow the various employees their rights and responsibilities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. Before we move on to the Routine, I have a vignette for you. There's a reference document on your desks.

Statement by the Speaker

MLA Oath of Allegiance

The Speaker: With the election of 2008 the number of members elected since 1905 has grown to 791. Following each election each member takes the oath of allegiance and signs the oath of allegiance book on the date he or she was sworn in, and their signatures are attested to by another individual. We have now concluded a rather lengthy research project by Val Footz of the Legislature Library and have determined the order in which each of the 791 MLAs was or would have been sworn in for the first time.

The first signature by an MLA is that of Alexander Cameron Rutherford from the constituency of Strathcona, and he was sworn in and signed the oath of allegiance book on March 15, 1906. His signature was attested to by G.H. Babbitt, the official secretary. Rutherford became MLA 1.

The 100th new MLA to have been sworn in was James Weir from the constituency of Nanton. He was elected for the first time on June 7, 1917, and was sworn in on February 7, 1918. He is thus MLA 100. Weir's signature was attested to by R.T. Stafford, the official secretary.

The 500th MLA to have been sworn in was Henry Kroeger from the constituency of Sedgewick-Coronation. He was elected for the first time on March 26, 1975, and was sworn in on May 1, 1975. His signature was attested to by Lieutenant Governor Ralph Steinhauer. Kroeger is MLA 500.

If you're fascinated by numbers and believe that numbers have meanings, consider the following: the Premier is MLA 649, the MLA for Red Deer-North is MLA 707, the MLA for Calgary-Varsity is MLA 747, and the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford is MLA 777. The last MLA to have been sworn in as an MLA, MLA 791, is the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

A number of individuals were elected as MLAs and were never sworn in and thus never took the oath of allegiance. In the November 9, 1905, election Leverett G. DeVeber was elected in the constituency of Lethbridge. He was never sworn in as he was appointed to the Senate prior to getting sworn in. DeVeber is MLA 25 in our sequence system. On June 17, 1963, L. Petrie Meston was elected as the MLA for Three Hills. He passed away before being sworn in. He was MLA 406. Other elected MLAs resigned prior to being sworn in so as to bring about by-elections.

Prior to the 1967 election Lieutenant Governors did not attest to the signature of members. From 1906 to February 15, 1968, it was usually the secretary to the Lieutenant Governor who attested. On occasion the clerk of Executive Council also attested. Grant MacEwan was the first Lieutenant Governor to attest to a signature, and he did so on February 15, 1968, when he attested to the signature of Ernest C. Manning. The exception since 1968 occurred on December 13, 2004, when Chief Justice Catherine A. Fraser attested.

In the spring of 2009 each member will receive a certificate attesting to the date in which they were first sworn in with an MLA sequence number.

In a few seconds from now I'll call upon the members to participate in Members' Statements.

Just a comment. For those members who are on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, today is an example of what potentially could be an issue into the future. I do believe the committee is providing a recommendation to the Legislative Assembly that regardless of where we are in the Routine, at 3 o'clock we will leave the Routine and go into the business of the day. We're now at least 12 minutes away with members' statements. If there were reports, they would have to come in. If there were reports by standing and special committees, if there were introductions of bills, they would not under a 3 o'clock start be able to do it today.

Members' Statements

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

Sikh Community Food Bank Fundraising Efforts

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour. I introduced to you earlier executive members of the Sikh temples, Hindu mandirs, the Sikh Federation of Edmonton, and the Punjabi Media Association of Alberta. All the community members are dedicated and committed to the teachings of the Guru Nanak Dev Ji to feed the needy. This year's fundraiser for the food bank was in celebration of the 539th anniversary of the birth of the first Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of the Sikh faith. The Sikh faith teaches sharing. That's why all the members of this community were able to raise \$2.6 million for the healing garden in the Mazankowski Heart Institute. For the Edmonton food bank last year they raised \$78,000 and two truckloads of food, and this year another \$61,000 and two truckloads.

2:50

I'm proud to be a member of the Sikh community. We believe in honesty, prayer to God, and sharing with people who need help. Our fundraising efforts show our commitment to the Guru Nanak principles. I pray to God that our community keeps working for good causes such as this.

In closing, well-being and high spirits to all. [Remarks in Punjabi] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Craft Council Open House

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the greatest things about art is that it can enrich your work or volunteer activities as well as your leisure time and home life. Back in the '90s when I was preparing annual reports for the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, I would often shoot photographs of artwork that

I'd purchased on behalf of the council and then turn those photographs into posters, essentially, with artwork on the one side and the annual report information on the other. In fact, people used to frame these, and I was always happy to draw attention to the fine work of our Alberta artists.

Tomorrow all MLAs and LAO staff will be able to pursue similar opportunities because I'll be hosting an open house for the Alberta Craft Council from 11:30 until 2 on the second floor of the Legislature Annex. All members will have an opportunity to view a wide range of arts and crafts: jewellery; Christmas items; silk scarves; works of art crafted from pottery, glass, and wood; all kinds of beautiful pieces. If you can't make it tomorrow, then you're still in luck because the Alberta Craft Council does operate a storefront shop in Edmonton.

As an MLA I've made frequent use of the Craft Council's work for volunteer recognitions, door prizes, giveaways, and so on. The recipients are always very appreciative, and I think it's important that we use every opportunity to build awareness of this important sector of Alberta's economy. We have thousands of incredibly gifted artists and artisans in this province, and they make a terrific, sustainable contribution to our economic development. The Craft Council is eager to work with MLAs to help us connect with local artists in our constituencies, so let's make this a nonpartisan event and come together to encourage and promote the arts in Alberta. Let's give a boost to our local value-added economy. Once again, I invite everyone to join me, and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

Thank you.

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

Onoway Community Champions Award

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to tell you about some real leaders in my constituency. Each year the students of two schools in Onoway participate in a province-wide competition to see which school can collect and recycle the most beverage containers. For three years running Onoway students have been provincial champions in their categories. Not only have they kept more than 181,000 beverage containers out of the landfill – remember, Onoway is a community of 1,000 people – they have received significant cash awards from the program sponsor, the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation. Not only have they reduced more than 2.78 tonnes of waste going to the landfill but have saved the energy equivalent to 31 barrels of oil.

Mr. Speaker, programs like this can also change lives. There's one particular special-needs student in Onoway high school who helps manage this program. His mother says that for the first time he has found meaning through his effort; he is defining his own life. Even if there was no significant environmental benefit, participation in the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation's community champions program has been worth it just for helping make a worthy life.

This student and other students are leaders of tomorrow, and I applaud them for setting an example. They clearly understand that Alberta's resources are too valuable to waste. Programs like this can help teach the next generation how to do the right thing and show them that there are rewards for their efforts. Mr. Speaker, special congratulations go to all the students of Onoway for winning this top award three years in a row. To show other people that their success and hard work has paid off, Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation has posted a special sign at the entrance to the town of

Onoway on highway 43 to recognize these students and their teachers for being the real environmental champions they are.

Thank you, sir.

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

Water for Life Strategy

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that water is one of our most important resources. It quenches our thirst, feeds our crops, and helps build our industrial growth. It is something that must be protected for today and tomorrow. Water is a renewable but finite natural resource, and its protection is a priority for this government.

This month marks the fifth anniversary of Water for Life, and as we heard earlier, this morning the Minister of Environment announced that the government of Alberta has accepted the Alberta Water Council's recommendation and released the renewed Water for Life strategy. As part of our commitment to provide safe, secure drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy, renewing this strategy was critical.

Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life renewal is an example of our government's approach to continually adapt environmental protection frameworks to ensure that they remain relevant during times of change. It addresses growth pressures, promotes conservation, ensures fair access and wise water use, and protects Alberta's aquatic environments.

The strategy clearly states that environmental stewardship is a shared responsibility among Albertans, industry, stakeholders, and government and advocates co-operation amongst all players. The renewed strategy sets clear direction and action for improved water management in Alberta, which will be implemented through empowered and informed partnerships. It highlights actions to implement drinking-water and waste-water solutions, implement water management and allocation systems, conduct water supply assessments, increase public awareness and education, and enhance water monitoring evaluation and public reporting.

Mr. Speaker, the renewed strategy is a great strategy that makes our new one look even better. Thank you.

St. Mary of the Lake Catholic School

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected as a rookie MLA in 1989 – yeah, it's not as long as you have been elected – I was bombarded with issues from my constituents. I'm sure all rookie MLAs know of what I speak. One of these issues was the construction of a Catholic school within the community of Slave Lake. It took a long time for this dream to be finally realized. It took many people. It took a few Education ministers, but built it was. However, the school has had some good times as well as hard times, and we weren't sure what the future would hold.

Today I proudly stand to recognize the accomplishments of St. Mary of the Lake Catholic school in Slave Lake. For the fourth consecutive year, Mr. Speaker, their provincial achievement exams for grade 3 math students have seen an increase. This represented an increase of over 15 per cent from five years ago, and they are now surpassing the provincial average of students meeting the acceptable standard. Their grade 6 students are also showing significant improvements with a hundred per cent of students meeting the provincial standard set by Alberta Education. This represented an increase of over 30 per cent over the past five years.

These outstanding results have resulted in St. Mary of the Lake being nominated by the Fraser Institute for their prestigious Garfield

Weston award for excellence in education. The school was a finalist in the improvement in elementary academics category, which recognizes fast, most consistent improvement in overall academic ratings over the past five years. This, Mr. Speaker, is a school that some people believed did not produce educated kids, but I am so proud to be able to stand here today and say to all who would not believe: take a second look.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

National Bullying Awareness Week

Mr. Rogers: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, November 16 to 22 is National Bullying Awareness Week. It's an opportune time to remind ourselves that bullying behaviour is unacceptable any time and anywhere. Bullying is hurtful, harmful, and not a normal part of growing up. It can and does prevent children and youth from reaching their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, 91 per cent of Albertans recently surveyed believe that bullying prevention should be an urgent priority, and 89 per cent believe that they have a personal responsibility to reduce bullying in their communities. The government continues to show tremendous leadership in addressing this issue of safety across the province, and Albertans should know that there are steps that they can take to learn how to prevent bullying. For example, anyone needing immediate advice about bullying prevention can call the 24-hour helpline. Many other resources are available for Albertans, including websites, print materials, and public education initiatives that can help children, youth, parents, teachers, coaches, and the entire community to address this issue. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the government is working with the Media Awareness Network so that teachers can access training resources that address cyberbullying and child Internet safety at no cost.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, we know that the bullying prevention strategy is positively impacting many Albertans, but government alone can't prevent bullying. Albertans must work together to make sure that citizens of our province feel supported and safe every day of the year. So let's take a stand and participate in bullying prevention activities during National Bullying Awareness Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to draw the illustration again. If you look at the clock, it's 3:01. If we put into standing orders something that says "by 3 o'clock," then I would have had to interrupt the speaker at 3 o'clock and say that's it, and the rest of the Routine this afternoon would have been lapsed. So if there had been questions like a point of privilege, would it have been dealt with or not? If there was a statutory requirement for an official document to be tabled on a particular date and we reached this point and the document couldn't be tabled, would that be a violation? This is the first time in this session that we've actually run into this kind of a situation. That's the only reason I give it to you, simply as an illustration, not to lead anybody or suggest anything, just to point out the practicality of the whole thing.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter that the chief financial

officer of the electoral division of Edmonton-Gold Bar received from an auditor who was hired by Elections Alberta.

The second tabling I have today is the discussions that were held on June 14, 2006, between the Ministry of Health and Wellness of the province of Alberta, Canada, and certain Swiss officials. In here is a very good discussion on the role of the private sector versus the public sector in health care delivery.

My third and final tabling is the final report Study Tour of Sweden, June 16 to 21, 2006, between Alberta Health and Wellness and various Swedish officials from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, public colleges and technical institutes, for the year ended June 30, 2007; public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, universities and Banff Centre for Continuing Education, for the year ended March 31, 2008; pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act the Alberta Ingenuity annual report 2007-2008; and responses to written questions 11, 12, 18, and 19 asked for by Mr. Taylor on June 2, 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has chosen not to proceed with his purported point of order.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 40

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate November 18: Mr. Dallas]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Red Deer-South, do you choose to continue?

Mr. Dallas: No.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To begin, I would like to thank the MLA for Red Deer-South for taking the time on Monday to meet with me and officials from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and my researcher, Ryan Gordey, to provide a preview of the intention of Bill 40. I very much appreciate the preview.

Also, I appreciate the clarification with regard to what was causing a bit of a concern, and that had to do with a youth potentially speaking with the children's advocate and the secrecy surrounding the confidentiality of that discussion. I appreciate that clarification, and I support it. Having been a teacher for 34 years, confidentiality between a student and between a parent and myself – there was a clear line, and to protect both the interests of the parents and the interests of the child, some stories remained untold in class.

Bill 40 has a number of good intentions. I would suggest that I'm 97 per cent supportive. The 3 per cent that I believe requires a degree of correcting has to do with the 41-day period of reporting.

I am concerned that without a time limit in terms of reporting, the reporting could potentially be delayed. I understand the ministry's need for a degree of flexibility, and in my amendment I will try to provide that flexibility. But again using my background as a teacher or the Speaker's background as a teacher – and several members here have been teachers in their past lives – if you don't set a deadline, the homework doesn't get done. It doesn't get turned in on time. That is the area of concern that I have.

Now, with regard to what is in and what isn't in Bill 40 and what I would like to see included, I was very grateful to this House last November, last year at about this time, when the House automatically and completely accepted my Motion 511 calling for a unified family court process. In preparing for Bill 40 and in trying to do my shadow ministry the greatest justice I could, I have spoken with an individual who is the former chief justice of the youth and family court system for Calgary. This was Judge Carruthers. Judge Carruthers I am very grateful to for providing me two and a half hours of his time in explaining how the court system works for child and youth and family justice, which is covered in Bill 40.

It was through his explanations and also research of my own – and I would like to thank former MLA Weslyn Mather, who previously did such a marvellous job in this portfolio that I have now received the responsibility for, for indicating that the majority of the rulings that have to do with children and youth and family are actually under the jurisdiction of the province. The federal Department of Justice, really, its main area of enforcement has to do with cases of divorce.

What I have experienced since taking over the responsibility for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in terms of shadowing is that a number of families are falling through the cracks. This morning in direct reference to Bill 40 we met in Public Accounts with representatives of the Children and Youth Services ministry, and I was pleased to have the opportunity at that time to ask a number of questions. What I have noted in my role as the shadow minister for Children and Youth Services is a situation which flies in the face of the children and youth ministry's declarations.

What was explained this morning and relates directly to Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, is that every effort is made to keep the child under the roof of the parents. Taking a child into custody is apparently a last act when the child's welfare physically, emotionally, psychologically is under duress, but the experiences that individuals have brought to my constituency cause me to worry about how quickly children are taken into custody and how fast they are put into a foster-to-adopt situation.

3:10

In one particular case a family of five, the youngest child being only three months old at the time, was taken into custody. There was no evidence of physical or sexual abuse, but the children were taken into custody and, again, against the children and youth ministry's intentions as stated, were separated. The three oldest children went to one family for fostering, and the two youngest – the three-month-old and a child approximately two and a half years of age – were sent to another family on the fast track for adoption circumstance. What has happened is that the potential for bonding with the foster family has occurred to the detriment of the birth family. This is an example.

Another example that Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, addresses to a small degree is a circumstance where a mother has indicated that due to depression and a degree of mental illness she was having trouble caring for her two children and requested that temporary custody be provided to her parents. Unfortunately, the parents to date have spent over \$255,000, appeared in court with their daughter to support their

daughter on 43 different occasions before seven different judges. So the whole idea of the unified family court system and the fast flow and a resolution to the matter has caused that family not only tremendous anguish but expense.

This last Friday in dealing with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, I again went to court, I'm pleased to say, on Judge Carruthers' invitation to get a sense of how the Justice department interacted with the families. In this particular case a young boy was taken out of his single mother's custody because the children and youth department felt that he was at risk.

Now, what caused the case to take place in the first circumstance was that the child was having behavioural issues. The mother contacted Children and Youth Services for a recommendation for a pediatrician that could help potentially in dealing with the child's outbursts. Unfortunately, the pediatrician misdiagnosed the child and provided a prescription which other doctors have indicated should never have been administered to a child under the age of five. The adverse reaction that the child experienced was heard over the phone by Children and Youth Services because the mother had called to explain the circumstance. Based on that situation, the child was taken into custody. The mother has been trying for several months to regain even limited access to the child, and that was the reason for the appearance this past Friday.

Another circumstance that Bill 40, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, with amendments or further support or a follow-up bill could address is the case of a young child who suffers from a severe form of autism and is living in the Medicine Hat region. Because of the severe nature of the autism this child has violent tendencies and basically bullies and scratches a younger sibling in the house. The parent would like to be able to keep the child within the house and has requested of the ministry that they provide \$14,000 for a service dog to help with the intervention that is necessary and the extra guidance for this child, but the Children and Youth Services ministry to date has denied that request for \$14,000.

This past weekend I had an opportunity to talk to a lady who is a constituent of mine whose child has recently been granted the support of a service dog. She was indicating how that young dog has bonded so well with the child. It's a young Lab that went through the service dog training. She was saying how the dog sleeps with the child and provides the type of interaction that children that suffer from autism need. In this case of the Varsity constituent it was a mild case of autism, but the dog has helped establish the confidence of the child and created a considerably calmer environment for that child.

It is my hope that with Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, the needs of children and their families will be better served. I am also hoping that within Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, the extremely important role that front-line service workers have working for the ministry of children and youth receives recognition. Earlier this week, on Monday, I spoke about the change fatigue phenomenon. There are a number of highly loyal front-line workers working for the ministry trying to do the job to the best of their ability who are being frustrated by the amount of red tape and forms that they have to fill out in order to have actual positive intervention or support occur for the children whose cases they have the responsibility of managing.

To conclude, I believe that Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, will move Children and Youth Services along. I believe it will improve the outcomes. I respect its support of the confidentiality between a child and the children's advocate. Where I would like to take it a step further is having the

children's advocate report directly to the Assembly. The information that the children's advocate would report directly to the Assembly would be of a generic nature. It would not contain any identifying information on the children in custody or the families that are currently trying to regain access to their children.

I believe Bill 40 is a step in the right direction. I commend the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I would, in conclusion, again like to thank the MLA for Red Deer-South for the collaborative process in which the bill was explained to me and to my researcher.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make some comments and ask some questions during second reading of Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2008. This is a dense act and one that needs some careful consideration and analysis. I appreciate the work that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has done in his role as Official Opposition critic for this particular area. I'll admit that I am working my way through this, but you really need to concentrate and know what you're doing here, so I'm not at the level of knowledge that I like to be when I discuss these bills in the House.

3:20

A few things have occurred to me. This bill is making some sweeping changes. At first look they appear to be, for the most part, positive and needed changes in how the government acts as a guardian and how it organizes and protects the children that come under its stewardship. There is a lot in here. It's covering adoption and guardianship and timelines and child support orders and video conferencing and a lot. I appreciate the government taking this on.

Our struggle as legislators, and it must be a huge struggle for the government, is to make sure that we are offering as much protection as we can to children. They are our most vulnerable members of our society and, I would argue, probably more vulnerable than others that we tend to place in that category, that being older people or persons with disabilities, because kids are not old enough to understand the law or understand what should or should not be done to them. They're more susceptible in many ways to abuse or misunderstanding and also not able to take advantage of programs and services that are there. They may not understand that that's available to them and that they can participate in those programs. So it really is incumbent upon the government and us as legislators to create a program that is as accessible, transparent, accountable, supportive, and offers as much guidance as possible while still preserving as much as possible an original family bond.

It's very hard to believe that people could abuse their children, but they do, and the evidence tells me that, and I like to work from an evidence base. We know that people do not always treat their children in the way that they should be treated. You know, if anybody wants to refer to what that means, well, the UN, for example, has a declaration on the rights of a child, which talks about things like the right of a child to be loved, to have food, to have a bed to sleep in, to have friends to socialize with. There's quite a long and comprehensive list of what we should be trying to provide or make available to our children.

There's a couple of things in here that, at first go, I like and a couple of things I'm not quite so sure about. I appreciate the effort that has been made around aboriginal heritage and that the planning that's involved when an aboriginal child is the subject of an application for either an adoption or a guardianship has been

strengthened and, in particular, reinforces the rights of the child to maintain their cultural heritage. I think we've learned that lesson, and I'm happy to see it incorporated in this legislation. I haven't had time to actually go back into those communities and ask them if they're happy with it, but I'm glad to see that it has at least been understood that it's an integral part of some children's lives.

My colleague has raised the issue about the timeline being removed from that. I agree with him. You know, when we're trying to judge after the fact about how good a job we've done with some of these programs, it's very difficult to find measurements to hang that on. Sometimes we have to just come down to simple things like, you know: did we do this within a certain number of days? In this particular instance it's removing that timeline from this legislation, and I haven't heard a reason as to why it's being taken out. So in this case I think that the provision that the director file a plan on the child within 42 days of the application for an initial custody order should be reinstated. At this point I would say that it should be reinstated because I haven't heard a clear reasoning for why that would have been removed.

I understand that the system sometimes requires flexibility, but flexibility without some pretty narrow parameters always seems to create difficulties for the government. "Trust us. We'll get back to you. Trust us. We'll be okay." I'm not willing to do that as a legislator or as a member of society when we're talking about vulnerable children. I'd like something more concrete to be able to judge this against.

I've noted some other areas as I've started to go through the bill. I'm pleased to see that in the new version of time in care of the director there's a clarification of how the time in the director's care is to be calculated. Again, that's the kind of concrete measurement that I'm talking about. The previous legislation, I think, had created quite a bit of confusion in the courts. As I've said in here before, if you write confusing legislation, you shouldn't be surprised when the courts either give you conflicting rulings or send it back to you saying that this is not manageable.

The act is incorporating the realism of our technology age and is allowing and setting out expectations around things like video conferencing and how that would be handled, under what circumstances, and some dates around it.

One of the issues that I continue to be very alive to and to collect articles and always watching for is information about disclosure of personal information. I am concerned about some of what's being anticipated in this bill around disclosure and nondisclosure of information around vulnerable children.

Connected to that, one of the oddities that I found in here is that there used to be a section that offered the nearest Legal Aid Society contact information to a child in need of a secure service. That's been removed, and instead there is a requirement to provide the contact information for the Child and Youth Advocate. I can't say that I'm in agreement with that.

In the one case they're being referred to a neutral third party, which is the Legal Aid Society. In the current instance, which is what is being proposed under the act, the child is being referred back into the same ministry because as we know and has been discussed a lot in this Assembly, the Child and Youth Advocate reports directly to the minister. It doesn't report to this Assembly. I'm not going to get into the argument about whether they should or should not. But in this case you basically have a child that's coming under the umbrella of the children's ministry and is being directed for help back into that same cycle rather than allowing them information about where they could get it from a neutral third party. I have real hesitations around that. It starts to look to me like overly controlling, which I don't think we should be doing.

Another section that I've looked at – and I would like some expansion of information if I could get it – is what is modifying section 52, the private guardianship. Now, it looks like it's expanding the field of applicants who can apply for the private guardianship. I thought the work that was done on Bill 24, the guardianship and trusteeship act, and this sort of wider definition of guardian there was quite good in that it tried to reaffirm wherever possible the autonomy of the individual. I know that children are not autonomous, and they have fewer rights than any other member of our society until they reach the age of majority, but I'm just wondering if that's part of what's underlining this expansion of the field of applicants who can apply for this. It would be interesting to see that. I also realize that there's a section that's coming in that's talking about the cultural connection plan for aboriginal children here when it talks around the guardianship. I'm just wondering how flexible that definition of guardianship and the extra categories that were being added in are intended to be.

3:30

Early on in the act it refers to the children's authorities, which were set up as a mirror image to the health authorities. I think there were always nine of them. There are still nine of them. I don't think they had a consolidation where they dropped down although I remember that the very early work in this had a fourth pillar, that was about the aboriginal culture. There's certainly reference to it in this document, but I'm wondering if that fourth pillar was kept. In the original meetings that led into those children's authorities and into the revised acts that were passed years ago, there was a really heavy emphasis on that. Actually, every group that was set up had to have 25 per cent of its membership, so a quarter needed to be representing First Nations or Métis.

I'm just looking for confirmation that that concept made it all the way through. I'll be honest; I haven't been monitoring what's happening in this area for some time. Frankly, I'm referring back now to probably when I was still with the advisory council, so in the early to mid-90s.

Those are some of the issues that have occurred to me while I've done an initial view of this.

I'm coming back to the disclosure section because I think we need to be very careful here. Ultimately, what I'm most concerned about is that we don't have the worst-case scenario, one that I don't see anticipated here, to be fair. But the worst case is always that you've got personal information that becomes a commercial commodity – let me put it that way – which could create difficulties for children, for example, in the future where it's connected to their, you know, credit rating or insurance or any of those things that adults worry about, frankly, their personal information in the wrong hands of somebody and how it can be misused or used for marketing purposes. I mean, marketing is often at worst an irritant, but in very much the wrong hands it can be quite criminal. I am concerned about some of what I've started to read in this act around that.

I have heard from some people who have been writing to me around this issue, and this is evidently an intention to withhold documents of children who've accessed protection from the child advocate office, and they're wondering about the potential to affect any child. Their concerns are that the public needs to realize the ramifications of this, obviously.

A real concern was raised about encompassing individuals with disabilities, specifically children with disabilities, and whether they fall under that umbrella of ministry care. Parents who are seeking answers on behalf of a child with a disability who may have been abused or who was abused while receiving services under the ministry could be silenced because now they can't talk to somebody

else because the information about the child is protected. I'm wondering how the ministry is working its way through that.

I'll look forward to the answers as we move into Committee of the Whole.

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

I'm prepared to recognize, then, another speaker.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 47
Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework)
Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate November 18: Dr. Swann]

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak to Bill 47, the Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008. As all of us in the House are aware, this has been very contentious, very public engaging, I guess, with a lot of views on what has actually happened in the past, on what point and what stage we're going down in the future and what effect the new royalty system is going to have on what is left of our oil and gas industry. What I mean by "left of" is that we have a substantial oil sands or tar sands or whatever you want to call it operation that has yet to be developed as well as an oil and gas regime that had formerly been in play that is almost tapped out or obviously may be coming to the later stages or not quite as productive as it once was.

If we look at how we got to the recent royalty sort of debate, which happened, I believe, almost a year ago today or around this time frame when this was being kicked around, if I remember correctly, what caused the big stir was the Auditor General's report. This was back in his September 2007 report. It noted that the Department of Energy had been doing reviews since 2000 that were basically indicating that the government wasn't maximizing its take from our royalty resources.

Everyone, I think, to a person in this House would agree that the role of government in any royalty regime is to maximize the take for the Alberta taxpayer because they are the owners of the resource. It's like former Premier Lougheed indicates: you should think of the royalties as your own home. When you're about to sell your home, you don't sell it for 20 cents less on the dollar than it's worth just because you can, I guess, or just because your neighbour may want it or you have a friend that may want it or a cousin or a relative who may want it. The simple fact is that you have to look out for the taxpayers and the people you're providing services for, and in Alberta that means maximizing our take from what we get from the royalty regime.

As indicated, the Department of Energy's own reviews back to 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2005 all suggested that increases in royalty rates were there for the taking. Now, using my crystal ball looking backwards, I can't tell you what those rates should have been or what they should have been increased to. Nevertheless, they should have been increased, and the simple fact of the matter is that they were not increased. That was disappointing, and in fact we may be living through the folly of not following up on those recommendations here today, when we see announcements coming out of the finance department that indicate that our days of great windfalls

from our oil and gas revenues may in fact be coming to an end. I think that's, more importantly, where we've got to go.

3:40

I can't tell you even whether, you know, the new royalty framework is appropriate. I guess that's why we have a Department of Energy and a Minister of Energy, with all the resources behind it, that has investigated what, in fact, is maximizing the take for Alberta's citizens, that's dealt with the free market system, which has served Alberta fairly well. It has to balance the needs of both, I guess, keeping an industry afloat but also at the same time recognizing that we do have to maximize our total take. That total take should be recognized in what we get from land sales, what we get from our royalty rates, and what we take in in corporate taxes. All three of those things add to the monetary pie that comes the government's way. I'm hopeful that this new royalty system gets there.

Again, I'm relying on a lot of the Department of Energy's good work that they probably put into coming up with this royalty framework. But, you know, we will see where this goes. Again, I can't help but stress the disappointment I felt at that time as a citizen of Alberta, a taxpayer, in hearing that we had not collected or maximized our take as a people over the course of that time.

If we also now turn to what the new royalty system actually does, I think one thing that I am fairly happy with, Mr. Speaker, is the ability of taking the bitumen royalty in kind. This 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 in that producers give the government a share of the oil rather than the value of that share in cash. So we can take this bitumen in kind, and we can then send it to refining facilities, which have billions of dollars in upgrading costs. We can send this bitumen that we've taken in kind to those processors here in Alberta, and it can be upgraded and sold for more money.

Taking this bitumen in kind is, in fact, a good thing. It's exactly what we on this side of the House have been calling for for some time, more of this type of activity, this value-added activity that has to come to Alberta sooner or later, rather than us simply being hewers of wood, drawers of water, and drillers of oil. It has to be more than that if we are going to really, again to use the phrase, maximize the capacity of our oil and gas industry to serve Albertans, which is what I stated was what we as a governing body should be doing. So I've got to speak very favourably on that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are some other things that we, hopefully, will get to in the future that are encompassing more of our total, I guess, royalties or energy mix underneath an agreement. For instance, I'm not sure if – well, I won't speak about what I'm unsure of, and we'll leave it at that. Like I said, I hope the government has it right in coming up with this rate of royalty return in that I hope we are maximizing our return, looking at those three things: the total take from land sales, the total take from royalties, and what we get from corporate taxes, whether this now actually gets us there to maximize what is coming in on behalf of Alberta citizens.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak to this bill at this time.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is such an important issue for Alberta, and people come at this with such high

expectations and hope and so much conflict. So I don't know what to think of this act, to be honest with you, and I don't know whether I'm going to support it or not.

You know what? I'm proud to be an Albertan. My family has been involved in the oil and gas sector. My dad was born in Turner Valley, used to hang out and party underneath the gas flares. He worked on them as well and spent most of his youth building drilling rigs and moved around all of Alberta doing that. We're appreciative of the prosperity that our nonrenewable resource revenues have brought us, and I will make no bones about the fact that I like that money. I like that money that gives us enough opportunities to look at being exceptional, extraordinary, the best, amazing. I like stuff like that.

When I travel, I want to go to other cities and go: "Holy mackerel. We could do that. We could do that." I'd like to see terrific public transit. I'd like to see things like the national portrait gallery – well, that's not going to happen now – creative, innovative, exciting places for us to live, wonderful architecture, things that please the eye and feed the soul. As the president of the University of Alberta keeps saying – I'm with her on it – I'd like to see the U of A be one of the top 20 universities in North America. I'd like to see high-speed rail transit linking Edmonton and our international airport and maybe beyond that. There are a lot of things I'd like to see for this province.

There's no question that I appreciate the revenue that can flow, and I understand that I am damn lucky to have been born on a piece of geography where the dinosaurs lay down and died. It's a gift, and we are wealthy enough in that gift that we can welcome other people from other places in the world here to share that gift with us. I hope we continue to do that and don't get all funny about it and say no one else can come here because it's all ours and no one else can have it.

It's important to me that we are able to access that money on behalf of all Albertans. We all own it. It's our asset. But it doesn't mean much if we go and pound our little fists on the prairie and try and pull the oil out by ourselves. It's not going to happen. So we rely on an oil and gas industry that does that exploration, that finds ways to pull that resource out of the ground for us, and then you have the government coming in to regulate it both as far as the environment is concerned but also: how do we get our share of that money? This is where the sticking point comes, about how we do it.

The other part where I'm really torn on this is environmentally. It can be a dirty business, and we know now that these sectors can use a lot of other resources in trying to extract them. They can use a lot of water. They can use a lot of other energy sources in running turbines and pumps and factories and plants and the machinery to be able to extract these resources. Our great challenge is to be able to balance the effect this has on the environment and what it does to the environment long term against getting that money that opens so many opportunity doors for us. I think that's what challenges us every day.

3:50

I think that sometimes the government is successful – I'll give them the benefit of the doubt – and sometimes they're not successful on this. It is an area that continues to change fairly dramatically. I mean, I look at what's happened, you know, since my father was hanging out and partying underneath that gas flare in Turner Valley to where we are today, the technology that's been developed and, frankly, the fields that have been used, that have been mined out, the changes in public attitude towards things like coal, which used to be, well, black gold. Now it's viewed by many as having a taint on it because, of course, when you burn it, it creates toxins that are released into the atmosphere.

A lot of things have changed inside of one person's life. I'm obviously referring to my dad and using his lifeline and even then not his whole life. I mean, he's now in his 80s, but if we just look at him as a young man working, over the last 60 years a lot has changed in those sectors. So we need legislation and regulation that's fairly dynamic in the way it's able to capitalize to get the best that we can possibly get for all Albertans.

One of the things that I think the government did right – well, I think it's going to work for us – is the taking of the bitumen as part of the royalty. I know my colleague has talked about that and some of the other colleagues, but here's why. I'm a big proponent of value-added. I'm a big proponent of what the Alberta Liberals developed as the western tiger idea, which was to encourage upgraders to be built here, and if they couldn't be built here, rather than letting resources be pumped across the border to our southern neighbour, to encourage and allow our Canadian neighbours to develop those upgraders that could be refining our natural resources, to keep it in the family, so to speak. I really thought that was a very strong policy, and I still support it.

I think that taking the bitumen will probably at some point put us in a partnership – dear God, not a P3 – I'm assuming, with a company that builds upgraders, and we could start realizing the profit on that upgrading in more ways than one. That truly is value-added, and I think that's a great thing for Albertans.

Again, we're trying to balance the money that we can get from that resource with the effect that it has on the environment. My constituents tell me over and over again – for a group of people that live downtown, you wouldn't tend to think they'd be the most green people, that they'd be constantly on their tiptoes with their hands in the air going, "Excuse me, but please make sure that this is environmentally sustainable," but they are. The environment and environmental issues are consistently in the top three issues of concern for my constituents and have been for the 12 years that I've been here, and it's still happening. They are very keyed into that. They're very alive to environmental issues.

They've made it very clear to me that they expect me to be in here pushing at all times for the cleanest and strongest possible environmental protections because, you know, as one person said: "What's the point? We could have all the money in the world and look out the window at Siberia. There are no trees, the waterways are sludge, and it's all crap. What's the point?" It's the same thing as being a millionaire and not having your health. If you can't buy your health, then what have you got, really? So we're really under pressure to develop those two things simultaneously and to make sure that we're protecting the one while we develop the other.

But this is about realizing money from that resource. Part of what I was doing was going back and looking at what we have done here. I'm sure someone else at some point will do a sort of history of royalties. This is not my area of expertise, but as any kid who grew up in Alberta, you know the story of the blue-eyed sheik. You know the story of Peter Lougheed and how, when he came into power, he renegotiated those royalty agreements and got us a lot more money, and that did things like give us the start of the heritage fund. It did things like help us build the Banff Centre for the arts. It did things like build a lot of museums and heritage sites but also bridges and highways and buildings at the universities in Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge. So right from the get-go, the beginning of this party's term in power, we could see what is possible from that, and he certainly was willing to recognize that you can't write this stuff in stone. It does need to be flexible and to change.

I was really angry, actually, when the Auditor General's report came out that said that the government had not been taking advantage and realizing as much money from the royalty regime as they

should have been. I started out by talking about how much I want that money and all the great things that it can do for our province, and to find out the government had not collected everything that it could have collected on our behalf, I really wanted to commit violence on somebody, and I'm not a violent person.

What that should give us now is a cautionary checklist to use as a filter for the legislation that we have in front of us. The other thing it did was that it really took away my faith that somehow the Conservatives had a God-given ability to negotiate royalty agreements. You know, starting from Peter Lougheed on down you kind of thought that it was just given to them as a birthright, and what happened and what we were able to find out that happened here between 2003 and 2006-07 really just destroyed that for me.

We had the Auditor General essentially saying that – I'm just quoting from the AG's report on page 92 – "sound analysis of Albertans' most valuable physical asset does not appear to have led to timely action." What really happened there? They made five recommendations to strengthen the department's royalty review systems and enhance accountability. Where this government always falls down is around the monitoring systems that we put in place, clear benchmarks and measurements to test against. One is the standards being in place and measurements that you can look back on, benchmarks, et cetera; two is the monitoring; and three is the enforcement of that. Over and over I'm standing up in this House giving you examples of how the government has not followed through on that, and here was a big one.

The five recommendations that the Auditor General made were that objectives and targets should be clarified and publicized, in other words accountable and transparent; planning, coverage, and reporting of technical review work can improve; performance measures should improve; the department should periodically report royalty regime information; and controls over processes should improve.

I know my time is running out here, and I will have to come back at my next opportunity and start to work my way through whether this new royalty regime that's reflected in the legislation in front of us passes the recommendations that have been set before us from the Auditor General. The government calculated too low over that three- to four-year period, according to the Auditor General – and I know this has been disputed by the government, and I would expect them to dispute it – by around a billion dollars a year. That's a lot of money to not have, especially – you know, I've been talking a lot about savings programs – when that either could have gone into investments like education or been saved.

The last piece I want to talk about before I have to adjourn is around the junior operators. I think this legislation is not covering what the junior operators will need, and that may be the fatal flaw in this legislation.

At this point I'm aware that there are others that wish to speak to it at a different time, so I will ask that we adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Bill 48

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate November 18: Mr. Chase]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware that there have been some major announcements . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I think you have spoken on this bill in second reading according to our records.

Ms Blakeman: Oh. I need you to adjourn, then.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 48 at this time.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 44 Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise and speak about Bill 44, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008. You know, the object of this bill is to clarify the obligations of pharmacy proprietors and pharmacists. It clarifies the authority of the Alberta College of Pharmacists, the ACP, with regard to regulating the provision of pharmacy services, specifically regarding pharmacies' record keeping, record producing, and obligations. It outlines what information the Alberta College of Pharmacists can share with regulatory bodies, governments, and law enforcement agencies. I will speak to that a little later in that I do have some concerns with this sharing with many other bodies of government as well as law enforcement agencies, as we appear to be substantially eroding what our FOIP, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, previously sort of put forward as the guiding principles that this government and our legislation should in fact follow. Nevertheless, we'll talk to that a little bit later.

The Alberta College of Pharmacists is the college that is responsible for the delivery of pharmacy services in Alberta. It ensures 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 the clients. As many ministers note in question period, safety should be job one of this government. I like to see that our Alberta College of Pharmacists is also looking to ensure that safety is job one. It looks like this is trying to be reflected in this act.

The Alberta College of Pharmacists is governed by the Health Professions Act, which outlines the structure of the college and outlines the responsibilities for licensing, practising, review, and how complaints are dealt with. The pharmacists are members of the college that work in our community pharmacies, independent pharmacies, chain stores, hospital pharmacies and that teach in our universities, also do consulting, and work with government and industry organizations.

As we see the continued expansion of, I guess, what drugs can do and how they help us in our daily lives and that they're able to assist us to live longer, healthier, productive lives, the role of the pharmacist has continued to expand. As drugs have been diversified to help all sorts of ailments from not only the common cold to, basically, the 47 different pills I take every morning to help manage my spinal cord injury, the pharmacist plays a role now in the operating of that

and so should our regulation of what goes on in that industry and how they are acting. For instance, they are acting in health promotion now, screening for osteoporosis, diabetes, cholesterol, and immunization. These are things that a pharmacist should be involved in, the promotion of healthy living and how to keep things in check.

They're also involved in disease management, primarily in education programs for hypertension, asthma, depression, pain management, and blood sugar and blood pressure monitoring. They have the skills and expertise to do these types of jobs. It's important that they're doing these things with the professional requirements to both be doing them as well as having the public's safety at the heart of their diagnosis and any advice they're giving to clients of their pharmacy. They are involved in ensuring effective drug therapy outcomes. They're also becoming involved in primary health care, and that's for treatment of minor injuries and ailments, the use of braces, crutches, wheelchairs, and walkers, which are often readily sold in their stores. They have the expertise to deal with that.

If we look at the expansion of what pharmacists are doing, they are involved in sort of the regulation of some opiates through our methadone programs and other things like that that are assisting people who have I guess become addicted to, well, heroin, number one, and other things. They can be involved in their treatment and trying to give some advice to those individuals.

4:10

However, it appears to be that there is quite a bit of record keeping that is also now being held at pharmacies. Now we seem to be through this legislation allowing law enforcement agencies to get information collected by our pharmacists, the ability of law enforcement agencies to actually require pharmacies to release personal client information that has been used at the drug store or by the pharmacists. It begs the question: why is this necessary? Is this a continued erosion of civil liberties that, I would say, is an unnecessary erosion of our civil liberties? Can our police officers merely walk into the pharmacy and demand your information? It appears that that's the road we're going down. I'm very cautious of granting that type of power to our law enforcement agencies. This personal information has to be guarded on a much more, I guess, stringent basis.

We also see the ability of the minister to go and access personal client and health information about an individual who has utilized a pharmacy or a pharmacist, more particularly. It also begs the question, if the government doesn't have this information, of why they need to go, then, to a pharmacist when other channels are available to them. Or is this just that we seem to be taking the proverbial slippery slope to how much information our governments, our policing agencies can get and where and how? That is, of course, a cautionary note.

You know, with those cautionary notes stated, I will agree that overall the act improves the quality and the safety of our pharmacy services, which is the true essence of what Bill 44 is about and what I submit it should be about. I am hesitant. We seem to see it encroaching in all forms of legislation that personal information is now able to be accessed in all forms, not only by our government but by policing agencies, which are, I guess, de facto the government. I am somewhat worried about that. But let's hope this legislation is another safeguard that adds more accountability to our health care system and that pharmacists and pharmacies continue to serve the good people of Alberta as we continue to strive to live longer, more healthy, and more productive lives.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to speak to this bill today. I will leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. This is another really interesting and possibly exciting bill, but to tell you the truth, at this point I'm not inclined to support it at second reading. I may be contradicting the indications of my colleague who is our caucus critic on this, but I have some hesitations around this bill.

Let me say from the start that in my previous incarnation as the health critic for the Liberal caucus, I worked a lot with the pharmacists, with the college, with the association. I've got a lot of respect for what they're doing, and in fact one of my previous colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, was a pharmacist as well. I have a lot of respect for the amount of training that they have to take, which was way more than I ever thought it was, and for the integrity that they bring to their work.

Having said that, pharmacy is an interesting one because it is one of the areas of health practice that merges or melds entrepreneurship with health provision, and this is where that conflict starts to develop here. My colleague from Edmonton-McClung was a marketing maverick. He always had ideas about how to get a message out or, you know, how to move an issue along or how to share information. I mean, we couldn't always do what he was suggesting, but, boy, he had a lot of ideas about it, and I think he was a very successful business owner. I think he still owns a pharmacy with his family.

Dr. Taft: He actually sold it.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm sorry. I guess that's not true anymore.

But, you know, he was a real amalgamation of that health professional and an entrepreneur. To me this is where I always struggle with what's going on because you've heard me talk many times in here about how important it is to place very clear limits around how other people can use personal information and, in this case, personal health information. Essentially, I think what we need to be very clear about and have the limitations put on is: who collects the information? For what purpose is the information collected? Is it allowed to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was collected? Who else sees this information? For how long is it kept, and how is it disposed of?

You know, I've just got those things in my head now because I deal with so many of these issues around surveillance issues and privacy issues now. When you start to look at this, all of those cameras that they've got in stores, in malls, in parkades and all kinds of places now, you think: "Oh, that's great. That's making me safer." But then you start to go: "Okay. Well, who's actually looking at this, and what are they using it for? Are they using it for purposes beyond the safety surveillance for which they collected the information? How long are they keeping that surveillance tape?" It may have made perfect sense that I was in that parking garage in 2008, but it might be very odd if I was in that parking garage in 2010. If they keep that surveillance tape and use it for a different purpose that I'm not aware of at some point in the future where I can't even talk about it or know that it's being used for a different purpose, things start to get very interesting. So you start to see why I get so concerned about this.

I went back to the Health Information Act to sort of clarify in my head: what's the point of collecting this information, and where do pharmacists fit into this? The truth is that pharmacists are respected as integral partners in our health delivery system, and they, in fact, are specifically covered under the Health Information Act. When we look at the definitions that appear in section 1 of the Health Information Act, in fact under section 1(f), custodian, those are those that are allowed to get access to information and to hold that information about people. Listed under custodian is

(x) a licensed pharmacy as defined in the Pharmacy and Drug Act;

(xi) a pharmacist as defined in the Pharmacy and Drug Act.

So they're clearly included in being able to get access.

What's health information? Well, the definition of health information under our act means any or all of the following:

(i) diagnostic, treatment and care information;

(ii) health services provider information;

Who's giving you that service, in other words.

(iii) registration information.

And registration information is a whole other long category. Let me see if I can find that for you. Oh, it's not going to jump out at me really quickly. Okay.

4:20

It can contain additional information like your home address and telephone number, your personal identification number with health care, your race, your gender, your age, your nationality. You think: "Yeah, yeah. So? Who cares?" Well, when you start looking at things like nationality, we grant certain things to people in this country based on nationality, so someone knowing whether you have that nationality or not becomes very important in certain circumstances.

Dr. Taft: I need an example.

Ms Blakeman: Well, for example, if you have arrived here recently from another country, you would not be entitled to some of the social service programs that we offer to citizens. There is a waiting period involved with it. So your status as a Canadian citizen is important in being able to access or not access certain benefit programs. There's an example of why that becomes important information.

I've talked about what health information actually means, and much of our health information is individually identifying. Well, yeah, we're talking about who you are and health information that's specific to you. What does that really mean? Well, according to the act it's used to describe health information that "means that the identity of the individual who is the subject of the information can be readily ascertained from the information." It means that when they look at that information, they know that it belongs to Suzie Q. It doesn't belong to Suzie H. It belongs to Suzie Q. They can tell that from that information. So that's another piece of important information.

Now, when I worked on the Health Information Act, I was impressed by the way that act was set up because it was very clear about how they expected people to treat health information. The purpose of this act was to "establish strong and effective mechanisms to protect the privacy of individuals with respect to their health information and to protect the confidentiality of that information," and that is the first thing that's entered there. It doesn't talk about, you know, providing health services first. It doesn't talk about providing marketing opportunities. It talks absolutely, number one, about protection of privacy and protection of the confidentiality of that information, and this is not accidental. This is deliberate in the way this is put in here.

Then it talks about enabling "health information to be shared and accessed, where appropriate, to provide health services and to manage the health system," again not for marketing, not for casual communication, and, frankly, not for the police to do their job easier.

Then the third category down:

To prescribe rules for the collection, use and disclosure of health information, which are to be carried out in the most limited manner and with the highest degree of anonymity that is possible in the circumstances.

Whoever wrote this did a really good job because they put that proviso right in there. You collect the least amount of information possible in order to do the job you need to do and move forward with the highest degree of anonymity possible.

I've spent two-thirds of my time here describing how health information works, and why would anybody care? Because it's important in the context of what we're anticipating under this legislation. Some of the things that appear to be happening right off the bat I think are questionable choices based on the strength of what we see in the Health Information Act.

There are two things that are bothering me about this bill. One is where these Internet pharmacies are fitting into the picture, and where is the personal health information about this? Secondly, how do we help pharmacists deal with their dual role as entrepreneur and health practitioner? Finally, how do we make sure that information that pharmacists have access to collect and hold is not accessed by those that shouldn't be authorized to do so?

One of the things that's being contemplated in this legislation is to give access to people involved in law enforcement. Boy, you are really, really going to have to lay out a good argument for me on this one, to the sponsor of the bill, which is you, right? Okay. I'll be looking forward to why you would feel that you would need to do this. I understand the place that law enforcement has in our society. We are a society that agrees that we will give over certain personal freedoms, we will give over certain powers to law enforcement so that they can keep general peace: peace, order, and good government actually. I understand that, and I as a law-abiding citizen uphold that.

But I also know that police prefer to make their jobs easier. All of us do. If they could possibly implant us all with a chip and have us 24/7, 365 under surveillance, they would love to do that because then they would know where we all were at any one point in time, and I know this. With my law enforcement friends we laugh about this because, obviously, this is not a point where we agree. We also disagree on the amount of surveillance that is used because they want to find somebody fast, and they want to be able to kind of get an instant replay and decide what they think went wrong or what they think happened there and follow up on it immediately – fair enough – but in my opinion that absolutely has to be balanced with somebody's right to walk the street without being under surveillance.

I think they need to do their jobs, and I think what I'm seeing in this act is a shortcut. It's an easy out. To be able to walk into a pharmacy – and that pharmacist has got a dual role. Is he there to, you know, be an entrepreneur, a good businessman, a good member of that business community? You know, lots of people these days are trying to re-establish communities of businesses that are in neighbourhoods. They're walkable, and they've got a beat cop, and you want to get along. What kind of a position are we putting them in where we're saying that the police can come in and request information? I just have to say: sorry, but you as officers have access to a lot of other sources of information, and I cannot see why you need to get access to personal health information to complete your job.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and I disagreed vehemently when we were both on the Health Information Act around an amendment that he was successful in getting passed – well, no surprise; you guys are the government; you got the most votes – and in fact it came through as legislation, and I still think it is wrong. It essentially allowed police officers who were not in hot pursuit, who were not pursuing information on vulnerable people – so there was no emergency. There was no vulnerable person that was imminently in danger. It was actually pretty casual circumstances

where an officer could go into an emergency ward and request information about somebody that was in the emergency ward or in the hospital. The health practitioners are required now to hand over the information about the person, including their home address, telephone number, and some of the other bits of information that I've talked about: gender, race, age, what put them in the hospital, et cetera.

This was all around gunshot wounds, to which I said: if you're really worried about gunshot wounds, then do a law about gunshot wounds and getting information about people turning up in emergency wards that have been shot. But don't give blanket ability for police officers to show up in nonemergency situations, not worried about vulnerable people, to get health information about people. It's just so ripe for misunderstanding, misuse, and, I think, dire circumstances.

I know that the health profession is currently struggling with this. How the heck do they tell if one of their patients may or may not be involved in something so that they're now obliged to report them to the police? It stinks. I still don't like it, but it got passed.

4:30

I'm watching the same sort of thing, I think, come through this legislation where it's an easy stroll for an officer to walk in there while they've got nothing better to do or are just passing by and say: "Hey, can I check on Joe H.? You know, is he a diabetic? Has he got anything that would bring him in here? Does he come in regularly to get his prescription refilled every Thursday afternoon at 2 o'clock? I could just hang around outside and pick him up." There are other ways for officers to do their jobs, and there are other tools at their disposal besides using personal health information to do it.

I'm not too keen on what I'm seeing in this bill so far. I'm always willing to listen to arguments, if I can be convinced otherwise. But I have serious reservations about that particular clause in this bill, and overall I'm not seeing assistance to pharmacists in trying to work their way between that entrepreneurial and health service provider role.

Finally, I'm not satisfied that we have worked out a good solution to personal health information out there on the Internet zooming around because of Internet pharmacies. Once that health information is out there on the Internet, you have lost control of it. It's gone. You've got no control over which database it gets into. We know with the PATRIOT Act that any information that gets into a subsidiary of an American organization is open for use as they see fit. That's your personal health information and all of the implications for your being able to work or get citizenship or travel or get a passport. All of those things appear so easy and innocent. Once somebody else has got information that they can misinterpret on your behalf, you're in trouble, and you have almost no recourse to figure out who's got the information and how they are using it in a way that's now being turned against you. You will never be able to find out where it went wrong. It's out there, and you've lost control of it. That's a huge concern for me around this bill.

Well, thank you for allowing me to put my concerns on the record. I look forward to this. I hope this is a vigorous and thorough debate. It should be. I hope everyone gets involved in it because all of us sooner or later are going to end up using a pharmacist. Unfortunately, we all probably will not enjoy perfect health and will likely need the services of a health provider, so this is important stuff that's happening here, and we need to do it right because if we screw it up, it's going to hurt us and other people for a long time to come. That sounded really dire, but you understand what I mean. This is big stuff we're playing with. We're playing with live ammo here, and

we have to do it right, or it moves far beyond the people in this room and far beyond our ability to pull it back and fix it.

Thanks very much.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the debate, and I've been struck by a couple of things. I also just want to get on the record – and the sponsoring member might be able to address this specifically – that in the bill section 18 simply repeals section 30 of the previous act. Section 30 presently reads: "Drugs may be compounded, dispensed, provided for sale or sold only in a licensed pharmacy or an institution pharmacy." My question, that I hope the minister will answer, is: why are we repealing that? Why are we saying that it will no longer be required that drugs are compounded, dispensed, provided for sale or sold only in a licensed pharmacy or an institution pharmacy? I expect that there's a good explanation, but I don't know what it is right now.

My comments really have to do with the potential cost implications of this legislation. Now, if you think about the role of a pharmacist in the process of the treatment of illnesses, they are in a position fairly unique, a position that our society has actually worked fairly hard to remove doctors from, and that is the position of being both entrepreneur and treader of disease. There is an inherent conflict of interest in that position, that our society has long recognized, for physicians. That's why there are a lot of constraints on physicians and why we've worked very hard to remove the financial incentive from the actual clinical decision.

We've not taken any particular steps, certainly not as many steps, in addressing that conflict of interest when it comes to pharmacists. A pharmacist can own their own business or they can be employed by a big for-profit multinational, a big supermarket chain, or somebody else like that, and they are directly in a position where their clinical decisions affect the profit of their business or the business of the people they're working for. That is a different position than we take with doctors. Doctors are often spoken of as being in private practice, but that in the typical medical model is not a corporate, for-profit function in the same way that a drugstore is. In other words, a doctor really is earning a return on their labour. They are not earning a return on their investment. Therefore, they're getting, in economic terms, a wage, not a profit. There is a very important distinction there.

A pharmacist working to build up his or her business or working for a large multinational is in a position where they will actually fuel the profits of their owners. Their decisions might affect the share value of the company they work for. In fact, I've spoken to pharmacists who tell me that in the large supermarkets and large drugstores, they're actually encouraged to take steps that have the patient go shopping in the store while they prepare their prescription. You know, you come in, you turn in your prescription for an antibiotic or whatever it is, and the pharmacist will say: "Well, that'll be half an hour. Why don't you just look around the store and come back in half an hour?" Well, that's a deliberate policy. That's a policy intended to get that patient to become a shopper. I think we need to keep these kinds of things in mind.

Now, why am I going there? I'm going there because if you back away to the big picture of the health care system, the single-most rapidly rising costs are drugs. In fact, it's now a number of years ago that the cost of drugs surpassed the cost of physicians. In other words, our health care system spends more on drugs than on physicians. Drugs have been proven to be the most difficult sector of our health care expenditures to control, and I believe that's because we have failed to successfully address the entrepreneurial

drive in the drug industry. We've in fact brought that drive right into the health care system, so it's no surprise. Every business person wants to increase their business. Unfortunately, in this case it's at the public cost.

When you think this through, you address the issue of market forces, the fundamental economic conflict of interest that pharmacists are in because they are both the professional treader of a condition and the entrepreneur benefiting from the decisions of that. They are often linked to national or even multinational corporations. I don't just mean drug corporations. I mean retailers. Wal-Mart, Safeway, all of those companies are into selling drugs. Then you understand that in the global digital economy information is money, so as we allow more and more information to be collected by pharmacists and drug companies on individuals, we run the risk that costs are going to go up and up and up because that information is going to be put to use.

I'm concerned here that we may be inadvertently giving greater tools to pharmacists and the corporations they work for to be used to further accelerate the rise in drug costs. My question to the minister or his representatives: has there been any analysis done at all of the implications of this legislation on the costs down the road of drugs? Has there been any analysis done on the implications of this legislation for putting information in the hands of pharmacists and corporations that could be used to market, that could be used to increase demand for drugs, to drive demand? If there hasn't, there ought to be.

4:40

You know, we need to understand what a big business pharmacies are. Mail-order pharmacies are a huge business now, one that I'm quite uncomfortable with. To the extent that this facilitates this, it may be the kind of bill that inadvertently gets passed that actually makes it more difficult to control health care costs. I would ask the government to try to address those questions that I've raised in my comments. It would be a shame if we're actually inadvertently doing something that's going to make the single biggest cost driver in health care get even further out of control.

Thank you.

With that, I would like to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 44 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 45

Statistics Bureau Amendment Act, 2008

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 45, the Statistics Bureau Amendment Act, 2008. Hopefully, we'll be able to respond to some of the questions that were raised during second reading. There have been some important questions raised about Bill 45: section 8, the override relating to the protection of identity; the availability of

statistics; and third, the regulatory power of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. I would like to address these concerns.

The override currently exists in the FOIP regulation. It has been added to the Office of Statistics and Information act for greater transparency, so the clause will now be included within the act to which it relates. The FOIP override in the act ensures that any identifiable information of a person or business being collected by the OSI through a survey response is kept confidential. I would like to make it very clear that the FOIP override in the act has been drafted to narrow its scope to the extent possible but still protects the rights and powers of respondents under FOIP. The override exists solely to protect the personal and confidential information of an individual or a business who has responded to a census or a survey.

However, Mr. Chair, any individual or business in Alberta responding to a survey has the opportunity to get a copy of what they have responded to. If they want, they could get their information through a FOIP request made to the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office. The Privacy Commissioner has reviewed our draft legislation and has written to say that he is satisfied that proper protections are in place for Albertans. The override clause is similar to legislation in every other jurisdiction in Canada. The clause is needed to meet requirements of the federal Statistics Act. Without this provision Alberta would not be able to receive information from Stats Canada.

Another question raised was on access and the statistics available through the OSI. The role of the office is to consolidate, collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical information. Statistics are derived from individual records that are grouped or summarized to create these statistics. Statistics are likely to cover social, economic, environmental, and other key issues. For an initial period of two years the focus of the OSI will be internal to the government. Ultimately, it will allow us to consolidate official statistics and other key government data so that the information we need is available and consistent. The OSI will work closely with all government of Alberta departments. This collaborative effort will build capacity in the government of Alberta for statistical functions.

A final question that was raised was about the regulation-making powers of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. These powers would be used to determine, for example, if a survey should be a mandatory requirement for respondents. Should Statistics Canada fail to undertake a survey that is necessary to Albertans, the OSI may have to do so, in which case Alberta would require this ability.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the office will work on behalf of Albertans to facilitate access to Alberta official statistics and related information to inform policies and decisions. In providing access to these statistics, it will be important not to release any information that identifies any specific person or business. The government is committed to openness and transparency. Any information that the OSI creates is meant to be made publicly available and easy to understand.

In closing, the proposed amendments will go a long way towards ensuring that we are able to provide better and more consistent information on behalf of the Albertans we serve.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments from the minister. We'll study those in *Hansard* and see if they address our concerns. I appreciate the effort. I couldn't quite follow every detail and nuance by ear, so reading them will help us out a lot.

You know, this is an interesting bill to rise to because there's a

history to this that's important to get on the record. The Alberta government used to have something called the Alberta Bureau of Statistics. It was a significant operation. I think it was just over in maybe the Park Plaza building or one of those buildings not far from the Legislature. It employed 40 or 50 people, I think, at its height. It collected and distributed and did some analysis on all kinds of information, which I think is crucial for steering a province, crucial for a government.

The role of the Alberta Bureau of Statistics when it was really at its height, through the 1980s and into the early '90s, was kind of like a dashboard. They gave you different signals on how things were functioning. How was the engine of the economy doing? Was it overheated, or was it cold? How were social indicators? How fast were things changing, or were they not changing? How much gas was in the tank, so to speak? All of those indicators were brought up, collected, and fed into cabinet and government through the Alberta Bureau of Statistics, and they were crucial, as it were, for driving the engine of government or steering this province. Sometimes they brought good news, and sometimes they brought bad news, but the important thing is that it was clear, unbiased evidence. If the unemployment rate was soaring, well, it was the Alberta Bureau of Statistics along with Statistics Canada that told us exactly what was going on, and on and on across all kinds of issues. I thought it was invaluable; however, some people didn't.

4:50

It's, I think, quite telling, Mr. Chairman, that one of the very first cuts made when Ralph Klein became Premier was to effectively gut the Alberta Bureau of Statistics. I think that's very significant because what that did was wipe out the voice of unbiased evidence and give much greater control to the voice of political propaganda. So you saw the rise of organizations like the Public Affairs Bureau, which in many ways is just a propaganda wing of this government. It does all kinds of things from placing ads to writing the questions and answers that the government members put to their ministers in question period. It does all kinds of things, and it is not interested in unbiased evidence; it's interested in political spin. I don't think it's a coincidence that at the same time that the Public Affairs Bureau really rose to prominence and was taken into a direct reporting line to the Premier, we saw the Alberta Bureau of Statistics, which in spirit was the exact opposite of the Public Affairs Bureau, gutted.

From that period on, really the last 15 years, we've had a government that has not had its own genuine authentic dashboard to read. There has been information constantly coming from Statistics Canada, which at one time was one of the world's most respected statistical organizations – it may still be; I'm not sure – but outside of that there has been no specific function equivalent for Alberta. Statistics Canada does fantastic work, but it is focused on the whole country. They do break many things down by province or even city, but they don't go into depth in the way that you'd want.

We have had a time for 15 years when, really, this government has been steering either by looking in the rear-view mirror or, frankly, with a blindfold and, you know, a prayer.

Ms Blakeman: That's a very funny image.

Dr. Taft: Is it? Yeah.

We have situations arising where things are over corrected and where we hit the ditch once in a while. For example, the Alberta Bureau of Statistics would have collected accurate information on the health care workforce. Well, if it had been around to do that, we would have seen that we were in fact making some massive blunders in the 1990s by cutting over 10,000 positions from that workforce

and that there could be implications to that, including what we face today, which is a terrific shortage of health care workers. That's just one example.

I was kind of pleased to see this bill come forward because I think that if this is a genuine effort at reconstructing the dashboard of government, it's a good idea. If this is a genuine effort at getting a flow of independent, objective evidence going to key government decision-makers, whether they're MLAs, cabinet ministers, public servants, whoever, this is a good idea. Of course, Mr. Chairman, the devil is in the details, so once again in legislation we see concerns around privacy matters. I know the minister has gone to some effort to address those, and we'll read what he has done in *Hansard*. There are some other questions about the authority and powers and role of the Alberta Bureau of Statistics or what will be called the Office of Statistics and Information.

There have been many references to this office conducting surveys. Mr. Chairman, I'm a skeptic of surveys, so I'd be very interested to know what kind of surveys we are talking about here. That's not spelled out. There is some value in having surveys: business confidence surveys, unemployment, whatever you might. What I would not want to see are political surveys conducted through this office because I think that would be an abuse of the office. I think that would be completely inappropriate.

We know this government spends a tremendous amount of money on surveys through the Public Affairs Bureau. In fact, they were just advertising a month or two ago a position for somebody to manage all the surveying that's done under the Public Affairs Bureau. I really, really, really hope – and I'll look to the minister; maybe he can confirm this in writing – that this is not going to be an organization that's conducting political surveys, that this is an organization that will be conducting genuine surveys into socioeconomic factors, maybe other ones, maybe environmental factors or something, but not political surveys. There's an awful lot of talk in and around this office about surveys.

There are other concerns. I know that our shadow minister on this has a lot of uneasiness around what's in this legislation. While this may have the best of intentions, it could be inappropriate in terms of how those intentions are going to be implemented.

I did think, Mr. Chairman, that it was important to get on the record the history of the Alberta Bureau of Statistics and the fact that we need that kind of bureau because, as I said, it's like a dashboard for the government. It's just a matter of how that dashboard is actually going to operate. What are the detailed mechanics? I'll follow the debate, read the minister's comments, and we will vote accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With that, I'll take my seat.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. On the face of it this looks like a fairly administrative bill, although I appreciate hearing the historical vignette from my colleague about the original version of this department now being reinstated. It's interesting why this same government would take it away and then re-establish it. Given how the mind of this government works, it must have a reason beyond what is obvious for what it's doing here.

So here's my question. The duties of the office, the purpose of it is "to plan, promote, consolidate and develop social and economic statistics or statistical information relating to Alberta," and then it goes on. What I'm wondering is if this will end up being used increasingly in place of public consultation. Public consultation is the big buzzword. You're supposed to consult with the public. But in watching this government for 15 years now, I'm always amazed

at the ingenuity of the government to consult the public without really consulting the public. I'm looking at this bill, and maybe it's just the hour that my little suspicious gremlins are crawling out to say: really, what's going on here? We know that people are increasingly disengaged with the political process because they feel they're not part of it. Okay. The obvious thing there is that we'll get them more involved; we'll have public consultations on everything.

In the U.S. you end up with all these propositions. You know, God bless the U.S., but they've sort of managed to pervert that system, which is now about who's got the biggest budget to run the biggest campaign for or against a particular proposition. So what was intended to be citizen participation directly in certain major policy decisions of the government has just turned into who's got the most money. But they do things differently down there.

When I'm looking at the public consultation that I've seen this government do, I'm thinking back to the health round-tables in which, you know, it was a big consultation except that only certain people were allowed to participate, and out of it we got some really strange health stuff happening. I remember that at a certain point I think health professionals were strictly prohibited from participating in the health round-tables. You think: "Oh, wait a minute here. Wouldn't we want to be consulting the people that are delivering these services?" But the feeling was that somehow they'd be tainted and that they would be overbearing in the process, so they weren't allowed to participate.

I think some of the strange things we ended up with are a direct result of actually not having people in those consultations that knew what was going on because, honestly, when I was health critic, I got the best information from the people that were actually working. They had very concrete solutions as to how the system could be aligned and made more efficient. I mean, yeah, sometimes they just want to make their own working day easier, but they really had a much clearer picture of what could be done without jeopardizing patient care.

5:00

When I look at things, here's my fear: that we end up with a series of sort of data mining, that we now have access to every Albertan or to a series of people in Edmonton, or we're going to do a random sampling of people across the province – and, gee, who would have all that information but the government; that's the one group that does have it all – and to be consulting, and I'm going to put little quotation marks around that, with Albertans by sending them an e-mail and saying: "What do you think about private prisons? Press this button for yes, this button for no." That information goes back again, and they compile that data and come out and say that people are fine with this or not. I don't know.

But it's not really a consultation with all of the various intricacies and complexities that a company – every issue we get into today, nothing is simple for us anymore. Nothing is straightforward. Nothing is black and white. It's all complicated. It all is multilayered. I think that that's why you've now got phrases like meaningful consultation, because people feel that there's been a lot of meaningless consultation where they didn't get to participate. I mean, I don't know how many of those sessions I was in where they had all the little coloured sticky notes in different shapes, and they would end up getting a fairly homogenous result out of a group of people because the system was designed to weed out those sort of maverick or conflicting ideas. But often it is the maverick or conflicting ideas that make us re-examine something.

Brecht called it the alienation effect, where you were seeing something that you were used to seeing, that was fairly commonplace, but then something would happen that would make you just

take a step back and see it in a whole new light. He often used music that counterplayed, for example, in working with Kurt Weill, where you'd end up with a really beautiful, pretty, sweet melody and some really raunchy, terrible lyrics that went with it, but it was that juxtaposition that got you to take that step back and look at things differently. So I'm not quite so willing to dispel that maverick or slightly different idea.

I watched all those people in community development work us all through all of these: I mean, the justice summit, the gaming summit, the health summit. Oh, there was half a dozen of them.

Dr. Taft: The growth summit.

Ms Blakeman: The growth summit, yeah. I think that's when people started to talk about meaningful versus meaningless consultation.

As I say, it might just be, you know, the paranoia gremlins that are coming out late in the afternoon here, but I have a concern about how this information is going to be used. If it's going to be used to develop public policy, it can be used in a way that is analyzing demographics and saying things like – let me use something we all know – our younger people are leaving rural areas and moving to the cities, and that has consequences for our rural areas; do we want to do something about that, yes or no? Then you can follow through on that public policy development from there. At that point I would say that you should go talk to some of those young people and see if they're interested in staying in the rural areas. If they are, then you've got some openings to develop public policy. If they say, "No; we're not interested, and we're never going back," you've got a different cup of tea to deal with.

But my concern here is that this is going to be used as a so-called consultation tool without ever actually consulting people, particularly when the government has so much ready information on them. This bill enables their being able to contact people, and I just heard the minister talking about surveying. So is this the new age of consultation with Albertans? Are they going to get an e-mail with a button to press yes or no, and that's how public policy will be decided?

Like polls – and I've never really believed polls, especially around elections, because they always say to people: well, if you were going to vote today, how would you vote? The interesting part of that is that we know that only 40 per cent of the people actually walk themselves down and put the ballot in the ballot box. So surveying a bunch of people about how you would vote today is interesting because only 40 per cent of those people are actually going to act on that. Are they the 40 per cent that said they were going to vote this way or that way? Or is it an even cross-section of people, so what you get is actually reflective of what you surveyed? I think that the people that specialize in polls will tell you that until you're really close to that election, you're not going to get a clear picture of things because voting requires people to actually take an action and do it, and phoning them up and saying, "How would you do this if we asked you about it?" is much different than somebody walking down to do it.

I've had a whole bunch of bills today where I'm not sure whether I should be supporting them or not. Those are the concerns that I wanted to put on the record about this because I think this could be a good idea. I think it could be very useful. I think it is a good tool for the government to have in its tool box, but I'm also concerned, given this day and age of the Internet and electronic technology, that it can be misused. I don't see the limitations, the seat belts, in place to stop the government from taking advantage of their access to that amount of information on people.

Thanks for the opportunity to put that on the record. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to speak to this amendment act, and I appreciate the comments of both of my colleagues so far on this debate. I, too, will be commenting, however, much more briefly than both of my colleagues.

I enjoyed the history vignette in that it looks like we're going back to actually collecting statistics here in Alberta, hopefully. I think that's a good idea, for how can we have discussions, how can we make decisions without having the relevant information in front of us? For instance, what people are up to, what people are doing, how much they're making, how much they're doing: all of that stuff is good information for us to be able to develop public policy that works, and it's difficult to do this. Making decisions in a vacuum is never a good idea, and it may be, in fact, that better decisions will be made now that this bureau is up and running, that it hopefully is collecting the right and relevant information that assists government to do their job better. So I for one think that's a good thing.

I appreciate the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Centre that this should not simply be used as a tool to serve as a means of consultation. It should not be used simply for saying: "Oh, all right. Here we go. The people support this. Let's use this as a means to an end and not really go out and get the information on what the people actually think or what actually is the best thing to do." I think my colleague from Edmonton-Centre canvassed that quite in detail and much more eloquently than I could possibly do here. So I appreciate her comments on that.

5:10

Just other than that, not really much more to add other than the fact that statistics can be used, are very important. For instance, if they didn't keep statistics in baseball, well heck, some people would be traded that shouldn't have been traded. Maybe if the Boston Red Sox hadn't kept statistics on how well Babe Ruth was hitting, you know, then maybe it wouldn't have been repeated. So we see that those types of things are important; they understand the true worth of individuals and true worth of what is actually going down.

I appreciate getting an opportunity to speak to this. I think it's a good move, getting this branch up and running again and collecting useful information that can help in the public policy debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll adjourn this debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Ms Redford: Mr. Chairman, I'd ask the committee to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 44. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 45.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur on the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 29
Alberta Capital Finance Authority
Amendment Act, 2008

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 29, the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Amendment Act, 2008.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This was one of the bills that was under my portfolio as critic. As I spoke to it yesterday in committee, there were concerns that I raised. I was able to work with the minister and a number of others, including the government House leader, and we have been successful in addressing my main concern through what will be coming forward under miscellaneous statutes. So at this point I'm very happy to support third reading.

Thanks.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 42
Health Governance Transition Act

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act.

I believe that we had a very good exchange of ideas and comments during debate on this bill, and I would ask the House to approve third reading of Bill 42.

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

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think after a few more people speak to it, he'll probably get that, just knowing what a popular kind of guy he is. [interjection] No, I'm just going to speak to it really briefly. I know there are others that are lining up on this one, so we'll adjourn for tonight.

The concern that was really raised around Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act, was people's deep concern about the reorganization that allowed for both AADAC and the Cancer Board to not disappear but to be removed. There were a number of concerns that were raised about what happens to their assets and what happens to their staff. I hope that the minister has been very clear that the concerns were expressed by a number of people around the lack of information that was available to the staff of both of those agencies. There were also concerns raised around the Mental Health Board, although it is not specifically disbanded under Bill 42.

I'm just going back in my head over a number of concerns that were raised here because I think overall our caucus is not supportive of what is being done here. We had talked about the assets. We had talked about the staffing. There were concerns raised about collective bargaining agreements and how that was going to work out through all of this. We still don't have a clear idea of where the various pieces of AADAC are going to end up. We've been told that they're not going to disappear, but we don't know where they're going to go. According to rumours the staff are hearing, which some of them are feeding through to me, it looks like they're going to end up in different places, and the programs will continue in some form or another.

5:20

You know, I think we've just got to be respectful of the people that work for us as bureaucrats and understand that these are people that like rules. They like certainty. I mean, these guys are not entrepreneurs. They're not out there taking risks.

Dr. Taft: Entrepreneurs like certainty, too.

Ms Blakeman: Well, true enough. I'm getting an argument from my colleague that everybody likes certainty.

Dr. Taft: You're getting supportive comments.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. I'm getting supportive comments from my colleague in an argumentative sort of way.

People that are really good bureaucrats are people that understand and love and embrace rules in delivering a program fairly across the board to everybody. That's why we need them. They're good at that. They don't improvise, and they don't run off and invent new things. They develop and deliver those programs in a consistent manner. So it is very alarming to people when they have their workplace disrupted as some of these folks have had their workplace disrupted and to not know what's going to happen. With that I agree. I think everybody would prefer to have certainty about where they're going to be working in the next couple of months, but particularly for those individuals that have a proclivity towards bureaucracy, this is very, very distressing.

I just wish we could be more trustful of them in sharing information with them about what the plans are for these agencies and allow them to make decisions in their life, then, on whether they want to go or stay or use their skills and upgrade or go back to school or whatever the options that are possible for them.

There are people really worried about pensions and how pensions would be transferred, as I said, collective bargaining contracts and arrangements, all kinds of things. You know, people that are out there on mat leave: what happens? They were on mat leave from the Cancer Board. Now there's no Cancer Board. So where are they supposed to go back to? Who is responsible for them? I think that's deeply distressing for a number of people. I just wish we could have trusted our employees better and shared information with them in a more up-front way because that hasn't happened here. There may well be management reasons why that information couldn't get shared, but I'm a pretty good manager, and I can't see how that would be happening or why it would be happening. Anyway, those were some of the issues that were raised there as well.

The Cancer Board. We had also raised issues about the donations and how that was going to be handled. That was answered by the minister in response to a question that I and others raised.

We had, as we now know, \$80 million spent in reorganizing these health authorities, yet we still don't have enough personnel available to open some of our brand new, shiny hospitals and care centres. That's a lot of money. After 12 years I've gotten used to seeing things in billions and billions of dollars, but I still look at \$80 million and go: "That's a lot of money. That's a lot of training. That's a lot of people that could have gone through university, a lot of upgrading that was possible, a lot of residency requirements, a lot of international medical graduates that could have taken programs to work our way into the system."

I know this has been in the works, but I don't know how much of it has actually happened and whether we've got the full costing in. Does the \$80 million we've heard about include the cost of shutting down the Cancer Board and shutting down AADAC? I don't have a clear idea of that yet. How does the redistribution, I'm going to

call it, of AADAC, because I'm assuming that it's disappearing, mesh with some of the initiatives that have been taken under – I always put the title of this task force backwards. Safer communities is the second part of it. Sorry. It was done by the . . .

Mr. Anderson: Safe communities task force.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. The safe communities task force. When I said that last night, I was told I was saying it wrong.

I think there were initiatives that were discussed under that, particularly around drug and alcohol addiction, brought forward in the context of making our communities safer. I'm not sure how those get implemented now. There was good work done as part of that task force, and I'd like to see it start to move through the system. In fact, we had a bill last night that clearly was coming out of that task force. If you read the task force, it's in there. It says that this is what we're going to do. Bill 50, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, is right in that.

I don't know how we get a carry-through there when the left hand is doing some really good work on community safety and recommendations about how we're going to do things, yet the vehicle that does those things in many cases doesn't exist anymore. How do we move that forward when it's not clear how it would be implemented? I don't think the government intends on abandoning the recommendations that came through that task force. But you've got me puzzled. How is it supposed to be implemented if AADAC, who was supposed to do it, who is the group that was developed by the government to implement those programs, doesn't exist anymore? You've got me scratching my head on that one.

I think that there are a couple of other areas in there that have not been addressed to our satisfaction. I know that we are trying to work towards modernizing our health system. It is a system that was

developed in the '50s and '60s primarily around hospitals and doctors, and that's not what we are dealing with in health care anymore. We've got technology and pharmaceuticals, and we've got home care and long-term care and palliative care and wellness incentives. There are a lot of other things that are involved in how we deliver health care in this day and age.

The decisions to change the structure and do away with those two organizations is, frankly, baffling. I don't think there's anything mean-spirited in this. I mean, somebody clearly thought this was a good idea. It just has not been articulated well enough for me, anyway, to understand why such choices would be made when there are so many outlying reasons for this not to happen. I just gave you a few, like the things that were under safer communities, those initiatives that are outlined there that we are not able to follow through on, or it's unclear how those things would be followed through on now.

I don't need to spend a lot of time on this. I've already talked to this bill in both second reading and committee, and I know that there are others on my side that are interested in speaking to this. But this is my last chance, I think, so I just wanted to put those concerns on the record. It just doesn't make sense what is being done here, and I'm really struggling to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. It's 5:30.

Hon. members, if you're not coming back at 7:30, please clear your desk because the Speaker will use this Chamber for foreign delegates tomorrow morning.

The Assembly is recessed until 7:30.

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

Table of Contents

Tuesday afternoon, November 18, 2008

Introduction of Visitors	1937
Introduction of Guests	1937
Oral Question Period	
Provincial Savings Strategy	1939
Lottery Funding	1940
Syncrude Royalty Agreement	1940
Groundwater Quality	1941
Temporary Foreign Workers	1941
Water for Life Strategy	1942
Alberta Health Services Board	1942
Environmental Spills	1943
Homelessness	1943
Sexual Orientation and Human Rights	1944
International Financial Crisis	1944
Farm Worker Safety	1945
Strategic Oil and Gas Reserves	1945
Climate Change	1946
Diversity and Tolerance	1946
Statement by the Speaker	
MLA Oath of Allegiance	1947
Members' Statements	
Sikh Community Food Bank Fundraising Efforts	1947
Alberta Craft Council Open House	1947
Onoway Community Champions Award	1948
Water for Life Strategy	1948
St. Mary of the Lake Catholic School	1948
National Bullying Prevention Week	1949
Tabling Returns and Reports	1949
Tablings to the Clerk	1949
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 40 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2008	1949
Bill 47 Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008	1952
Bill 48 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2008	1954
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 44 Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008	1955
Bill 45 Statistics Bureau Amendment Act, 2008	1958
Third Reading	
Bill 29 Alberta Capital Finance Authority Amendment Act, 2008	1962
Bill 42 Health Governance Transition Act	1962

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