



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 24, 2008

Issue 51

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members, and ladies and gentlemen in the gallery, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Wim J. P. Geerts, ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Accompanying His Excellency this afternoon are Mr. Hans Driesser, who is the consul general for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, located in Vancouver; as well as Mr. Allan Bleiken, honorary consul from Edmonton; and Ms Irene Bakker, honorary consul from Calgary. The ambassador has successfully served the Netherlands in a number of distinguished public service positions for more than 20 years. It was my pleasure to host the ambassador at a luncheon this afternoon and to welcome him on his first official visit to Alberta. The Dutch government has expanded its foreign relations with Alberta, establishing a trade office in Edmonton which will explore economic development in areas of future co-operation and collaboration. I ask that our honoured guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members here some 68 very bright students from my constituency who attend Julia Kiniski school. They are here to study government and to watch question period and otherwise learn about the public process. I'd be very happy to also introduce right now their teachers and group leaders, Mr. Dale Mandryk, Mr. Don Douglas, Mrs. Sue Skillings, and parent helpers Mrs. Lori Reid, Mrs. Melodie Reid, Mr. Dave Bunda, and Mr. John Van Den Biggelaar. I'd invite all of my guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a grade 6 class from Steinhauer elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. The class is comprised of 30 students. They're here today to tour the Legislature and watch the democratic process in action. They are accompanied by their teacher, Rachel Radmanovich; parent helpers Carol Graham, Kirk Morris, Richard Williams, and Alison Ross. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so lucky to have this school in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Joining us today are 46 students from l'école/escuela Grandin, which, as you can tell, is a French immersion and Spanish immersion primary school. These are really, really great students, and I'm very proud of them. They're accompanied today by their instructors, Mr. Michael Leskow and Mr. Manuel Flores. They also have a number of parents along with them: Mrs. Andrea Roy, Mrs. Jacqueline Ross, Miss Megan Sands, Ms Leanne Cairns, and Mrs. Lori Scheurwater. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four members of the Shepherd's Care Foundation, who own and operate the Kensington Village seniors' complex in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Calder. I invited this group here today to mark a special occasion for their organization in our province. The Shepherd's Care Foundation is the first in Canada to earn the CARF accreditation for its aging-services network. As a result of this accreditation Shepherd's Care is committed to ensuring that seniors have the necessary support and access to services that they require as they age in place. I will speak more about this accreditation later this afternoon.

Seated in the members' gallery today from Shepherd's Care are Mr. John Pray, president; Mr. Al Kalke, board of directors; Mr. Bill Bartel, director of the board of directors; and Maisie Wesley, their executive assistant. I would ask all four individuals to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two very hard-working people from Careers: the Next Generation seated in the members' gallery. Jerry Heck is the vice-president of stakeholder relations and growth, and Andy Neigel is the president and CEO of Careers: the Next Generation. I have had the pleasure of working with Careers in the past as a teacher and RAP co-ordinator. Careers touches all four corners of our province, linking education and business as it helps youth to develop important employability skills in the apprenticeship program at the high school level. At this time I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two outstanding Albertans from the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency, Andre Harpe and his wife, Diane Harpe. Andre is on the provincial STARS board and is also co-chair of the Valhalla community charter school, and Diane plays an important role in keeping him organized and on the straight and narrow. Mr. and Mrs. Harpe are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I met with representatives from the Peace River Environmental Society, an organization based in northwestern Alberta that is dedicated to conserving the unique quality of life enjoyed by people up north and preserving the delicate balance of the environment enjoyed in northern Alberta. In particular, they were here to voice their concerns regarding the potential development of nuclear power. With us today, seated in the member's gallery are Adele Boucher Rymhs from Peace River, Denis Sauvageau from Falher, Brenda Brochu from Peace River, and from Whitecourt the whole of the Commandeur family: Bonnie, Chris, Cole, Holden, and Jensen. Will they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Roseanne Ledingham, her husband, Adam, and their daughter Ashley Maire Lynn Downey, who have travelled from Calgary to bring to the Assembly's attention the need for early and sustained intervention for special-needs children. In order to qualify for help, children must first be diagnosed and appropriately coded. Without early intervention and sustained support children and their families experience increased deprivation and alienation. Roseanne, Adam, and Ashley are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional greeting of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Shepherd's Care Foundation

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated in my introduction of guests, we have several members from the Shepherd's Care Foundation here with us today for one very special reason. The Shepherd's Care Foundation is the first in Canada to receive the CARF accreditation for its aging-services network. This accreditation is for three years, and it is the highest level available. CARF International's definition of an aging-services network is two or more entities that co-operate with each other in delivering multiple levels of care.

As a result of this accreditation Shepherd's Care is paving the way for similar facilities to demonstrate this same level of accountability and excellence. They are demonstrating leadership by ensuring that seniors have access to the best possible levels of support and care. Shepherd's Care has nearly 40 years' experience in providing assistance and support to seniors as they age in place. I have spent a lot of time at the Shepherd's Care facility in Kensington, and I'm so impressed with the level of care being given to the seniors.

I would like to thank the folks here today from Shepherd's Care Foundation for doing a marvellous job in caring for our folks. It is

my hope that we continue to have exemplary organizations like Shepherd's Care that will ensure that our seniors have the best level of service as they are such an integral part of our community.

Thank you.

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

Deliberative Democracy and Climate Change

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From September 25 to 29 I had the pleasure of being involved in a very intense but very productive workshop on deliberative democracy and climate change. This three-day workshop explored how deliberative democracy could support meaningful progress in climate change discussions world-wide as well as decisions made here in Alberta.

Global experts came to Edmonton on their own dime to assist a broadly based group of Albertans initiate a public deliberation on climate change. These experts came from the United Kingdom, Australia, Europe, and the United States to lead us in action-oriented discussion on how we could engage the citizens of Alberta and the world. This cross-sectoral workshop included participants from provincial politicians, civil servants, municipal officials, environmental organizations, executives from oil and energy companies, civil society groups, aboriginal groups, and global experts on deliberative democracy. The workshop was considered to be a first, which many of the world will be watching. This workshop was a very effective way of engaging Albertans from every walk of life in discussions around climate change.

Alberta has been and continues to be at the forefront of addressing global environmental issues, and that's why Alberta was chosen to be the first. Deliberative democracy is an effective mechanism where Albertans can be involved in making Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

I would like to commend the efforts of Dr. David Kahane, who with other professors from the University of Alberta organized this workshop, and I would like to encourage all members of the Assembly to join me in exploring a very effective way in engaging all Albertans in the decision-making process as we search to make this province, this country, this world a better place.

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

Calgary Stampeders' Grey Cup Victory

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the people of Calgary I'd like to congratulate our Stampeders on their phenomenal Grey Cup win. Their convincing 22-14 victory over the Montreal Alouettes was a fantastic ending to a great season.

Quarterback Henry Burris was great. His arm hit the mark for over 300 passing yards, all while scrambling when he faced pressure to escape the Montreal D. Stamps kicker Sandro DeAngelis was also very instrumental in the win. His five field goals were the difference in the game. This year the Stamps were tops in offence thanks to Ken-Yon Rambo, Joffrey Reynolds, and CFL's points leader DeAngelis. When it counted, the defence played great, holding the Alouettes' offensive juggernaut to only 14 points.

I offer my congratulations to the entire Stampeders organization on their Grey Cup victory. The west superiority continues. I'd like to thank the city of Montreal for their hospitality. I know the city of Calgary will do an incredible job of hosting the Grey Cup next year at McMahon Stadium, and I know the members of this House hope that at least one of Alberta's two teams will be there competing for the trophy.

Thank you very much.

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

Finding Balance Injury Prevention Campaign

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to call attention to this year's seniors falls awareness campaign. The finding balance campaign was kicked off earlier this month on the steps of the Legislature with the participation of the hon. Premier as well as the hon. ministers of Seniors and Community Supports and Health and Wellness. Co-ordinated by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, this important campaign is intended to prevent falls so seniors can remain mobile and independent. Statistics have shown that 62 per cent of injury-related hospitalizations of seniors are the result of falls, and, sadly, many seniors are temporarily or permanently injured due to falls. Of course, anyone can fall, but as we age, the risk increases. Falls are the leading cause of serious injuries in older adults, and each year one in three Alberta seniors will fall.

One of the ways the Alberta government is promoting this campaign is by supporting the distribution of information on how to prevent falls to seniors' facilities throughout Alberta. Together, Mr. Speaker, we can help as many seniors as possible learn how to prevent falls and the all-too-often life-altering injuries. Preventing fall-related injuries by promoting safety is something we should all care about, from health care workers and seniors' service providers, who deal with the effects of falls on a daily basis, to the families of those affected by falls and, most importantly, seniors themselves. Also, with winter approaching, it is a good time to be mindful of the risks of falls with icy sidewalks and parking lots. Seniors are very active in their communities, and all Albertans should take heed in keeping sidewalks and parking lots clean and safe.

Together, Mr. Speaker, we can reduce the number of seniors who are hospitalized because of the injuries from falls. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Capture and Storage in the Oil Sands

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Ministerial briefing notes provided to both federal and provincial ministers last winter state that when it comes to the oil sands, only a small percentage of emitted CO₂ is capturable through carbon capture and sequestration technology. Given that capturing carbon dioxide emissions in the oil sands has been determined to be very difficult, to the minister: is it this government's plan to focus primarily on coal-fired power plants with this technology?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is partly accurate in his summary of what, in fact, these reports talk about. But there are two kinds of carbon capture and storage. One captures the pure stream of CO₂ that's used in enhanced oil recovery. There's another form that talks about direct injection. That is the type of CCS that would more likely apply to most of the applications in the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The revelation that months before making a \$2 billion commitment to this technology this government knew the technology was difficult for the oil sands: notwithstanding what the minister just claimed, that raises serious

questions about value for money. To the same minister. The Auditor General clearly pointed out that this government's climate change targets cannot be met, because actions are not defined. There's no implementation plan and no modelling. How can the public be assured that their money is not being wasted due to this government's lack of planning for this technology?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear in saying that 70 per cent of our reduction of CO₂ will be as a result of the application of technology. Some of that will be the application of technology on the industrial side, on the upgrader, on the refinery side, some of it will be on the coal-fired electric generation, and some of it will be in the oil sands. Not once do I ever recall saying that 100 per cent of this \$2 billion was going to be dedicated to reducing CO₂ from the oil sands. In fact, it's to our advantage to make sure that we perfect all of the technology at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I never claimed, and I don't think anybody has claimed, that 100 per cent of this money is going to be committed to the oil sands, so I'll just ask for some clarification from the minister. What percentage of the \$2 billion allocated will be going to the oil sands and what percentage is going to coal-fired power plants?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that question might better be directed to the Minister of Energy, who's responsible for the allocation of this fund.

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

Cancer Treatment Beds in Calgary

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The time is now for this government to get its priorities straight. In good times this government spends recklessly, without any thought to a savings plan, so when bad times hit, the government is forced to start cutting. To the minister of health: why was the decision made to indefinitely delay renovations for cancer beds at the Holy Cross hospital in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we as a government have some 5-plus billion dollars in capital that is either under way or has been announced. There are significant other capital requests that are out there. We want to ensure that the requests that are made fit with our longer term strategy on delivering health care in this province, and the capital to treat cancer is part of that deliberation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I know I'm getting correspondence from people desperate for cancer treatment in Calgary because there's a shortage of facilities. The cost of these renovations is estimated at about \$22 million. That's half what the government spends in one year on horse racing, and it's about the same amount this government spent on golf courses in the last decade. To this minister: why does this government put horse racing and golfing ahead of treatment and beds for people who are dying of cancer?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member can try and be as dramatic as he wants, but the reality of it is that there are a number

of requests for capital. I do agree with part of what he says, and that is that there is a need to address facilities for cancer. We're going to do that in the context of everything else, but, you know, you can't talk about spending money recklessly on one hand and then just go out and allocate money on the other without having a plan.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, people in Calgary and southern Alberta are desperate for cancer treatment. They can't get it because the facilities aren't there. Each Tory MLA has about \$750,000 in lottery funds to distribute every year. If the Tory MLAs from Calgary pooled their lottery slush funds for this year and next, they could pay for these new cancer beds. To the minister of health: will he ask the Tory MLAs from Calgary to pool their lottery slush funds and pay for the cancer treatment beds their city so badly needs?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd consider that but only after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview commits to spending his lottery dollars for his constituency in Calgary.

Dr. Taft: Point of order. Thank you.

The Speaker: We'll have a point of order later.

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

Alberta Health Services Board

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the minister of health have absolute power over health care in Alberta. The individual hired to recruit the permanent members of the Alberta Health Services Board is the ultimate Progressive Conservative party insider. Mr. Brent Shervey, the managing director for Boyden Global Executive Search, was both a campaign manager for the hon. minister of health and Mr. Jim Dinning and is also a generous financial donor to the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta. My first question is to the minister of health. Why did you hire your friend, Brent Shervey, that you personally introduced . . .

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

Mr. Liepert: Because, Mr. Speaker, there was an open RFP competition, and it was won by Boyden.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: what direction on candidate selection did the hon. minister provide to Mr. Shervey before the whole process was started?

Mr. Liepert: The direction, Mr. Speaker, was well spelled out in the advertisement that was throughout the province, and I would encourage the member to take a look at it.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: how can the citizens of this province, who cherish and support their public health care system, have any confidence in the new board when the selection process is controlled by Progressive Conservative Party glitterati?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can only suggest that we had a provincial election this spring, and the folks of the province spoke, and we're carrying out their wishes.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage in the Oil Sands

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Tar sands CO₂ emissions are set to go up while the whole world is calling on us to reduce them. Today tar sands emissions account for 5 per cent of Canada's CO₂, but by 2020 this province plans to have the tar sands responsible for 16 per cent of Canada's total emissions. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Something needs to be done, and it needs to be done soon. The world needs real reductions, and so far your answer is to bury the problem. What do you think it is that's going to make the CCS effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I need to correct something that the hon. member said, and that is that in Alberta we have oil sands.

Relative to carbon capture and storage, Mr. Speaker, quite simply the answer to the emissions problem in the province of Alberta and, indeed, globally – globally – recognized by the United Nations, recognized by the International Energy Agency, recognized by the EU, and recognized now by the G-8 and the G-20: carbon capture and storage will be a major piece moving forward globally with respect to control of our CO₂ emissions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Calling it the oil sands is like calling it light cigarettes.

Mr. Speaker, the government's own secret briefing document says with respect to the tar sands that only a small percentage of emitted CO₂ is capturable since most emissions aren't pure enough. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why are you wasting \$2 billion of taxpayers' money when your own briefing document shows that this process will be ineffective for emissions from the tar sands?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is, you know, a relatively lengthy answer to that question. But a short answer would be that the hon. member would do very well if he just took a look at Opti/Nexen's very recent startup of an oil sands operation in Alberta that is carbon capture ready. What I'm going to say is that for the program that we have in place for CCS, the \$2 billion, we're now in the second phase of the proposals. We're asking for additional information. We're not targeting any dollars anywhere at the moment other than that the target is a big, big target of reducing CO₂ emissions in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Pretty vague for \$2 billion, Mr. Minister.

Dr. David Keith, who was a lead scientist on the task force that produced the secret report, says that rational people should not rely on carbon capture and storage for tar sands reductions. To the same minister. We're not the only ones who think that you're being irrational and irresponsible with taxpayers. Why won't you invest in proven technology focused on renewable energy and take back this \$2 billion shot in the dark?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I don't know a lot about irrational, but I do know something about irresponsible. I think the member opposite might be getting close there with respect to being irresponsible in his position, trying to tell Albertans,

in fact, lies about what CCS can actually do. I think that there is a necessity for the member to explain to Albertans what it is that he thinks is wrong with carbon capture and storage as it relates to the sequestration of CO₂ and the elimination or reduction of carbon emissions.

The Speaker: I do believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood rose on a point of order with respect to a particular word that the minister used. I'd ask him to rethink this one. [interjections]

We're moving on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:00

Homelessness

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The true measure of a society is how we look after our weak and ill. Homelessness has been a big issue in Edmonton, last year culminating in the tent city, which has disappeared. Now, a member of the Lewis Estates Community League took me out to west Edmonton-Meadowlark and showed me an area where homelessness has hit the outskirts of the city. I understand that Calgary has a number of programs getting people from shelters into housing. My question to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: what is being done to help Edmonton's most vulnerable and homeless?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support a number of good programs here in the city of Edmonton. Just three weeks ago we announced a new pilot project in the city, where three excellent community organizations – Hope Mission, Homeward Trust, and Jasper Place health and wellness – have established a rapid exit program. That program will move 80 homeless families and individuals into permanent, safe, sustainable housing, and we did provide \$757,000 to assist with the new rapid exit program.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the people that live in Edmonton-Meadowlark are facing high rents, having difficulty affording their homes and paying their rents. My first supplementary question is for the same minister. What is being done to ensure that Albertans, especially those of Edmonton-Meadowlark, have access to affordable housing?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We know that people are at risk of losing their homes if they pay more than 30 per cent of their income toward their housing. It is for the daily living costs that the member mentioned, like rent or groceries or utilities, that we've established good programs like the homeless eviction and prevention fund, that this past year was 77 and a half million dollars. It assisted 50,000 individuals and families that weren't homeless and helped to prevent them from becoming homeless. As well, there's a direct rent supplement program that assisted 10,000 lower income individuals to maintain their homes.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a village to look after anybody who's homeless. My final question is again for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What has the minister and this government done to engage the city of Edmonton as well as community-based organizations to ensure that there is access to affordable housing to help the homeless in Edmonton?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the first step is really communicating with the mayors of the municipalities or with community-based organizations. I know that just this past Thursday I met with Mayor Mandel at McDougall Centre, and that was regarding the whole area of the 10-year plan that is coming forward in January here in Edmonton. As well, we've been meeting frequently with the seven organizations that are lending their support and their knowledge and their wisdom on how we can address this issue of homeless, and their plans have come forward as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Homeless Youth

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 77,500 Alberta children are currently living below the poverty line. In 1998 during a homeless count 60 Calgary youths were found to be living on the streets. In the most recent 2008 count the number of homeless youth identified was 384. The downturn in the economy is going to add to these numbers. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Housing costs in Alberta are among the highest in Canada and place a greater burden on low-income children and their families. With the downturn in the economy further straining . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be interested in the next question. I'm not quite sure what this question was, so we'll see what the next question is.

Mr. Chase: That was a handy response.

My second question: considering that the number of homeless youth is six times higher now than it was 10 years ago, what assurances can the minister give that the funding currently allocated to programs that help youth on the street will continue to be there when the government creates a leaner budget next year? What are you going to do to insulate youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our ministry actually looks after the area for people that are 18 and over regarding homelessness, affordable housing, low to moderate income, so I'll just direct that question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Chase: Well, we've got one handy and one speechless.

The third question. Failing to improve the circumstance for low-income youth triples the cost in health, justice, and social services later. Will the minister commit to making a real investment in low-income youth now and reallocate misspent funds that are used to improve golf courses and the like?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say that we find any homelessness among our young people very, very concerning. We do support young people. For anyone that's willing to take supports from us, we are there. We're there with wraparound services. We're there with outreach programs. We fund \$3.3 million to youth shelters across the province. In answer to your question, I can assure you that we will maintain this as a priority.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Market Access for Livestock and Beef

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much of the best beef produced in Alberta is raised in Whitecourt-St. Anne and, of course, Mr. Speaker, in your constituency as well. Some of the most concerned producers, worried about their farm families' future, also do so. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has briefed this House on a recent mission to Asia and, I understand, last week had the opportunity to meet with the federal minister in Ottawa to discuss the Asian mission and market access. What can I tell my producers when I get home this weekend about that meeting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member can tell his constituents and yours that I had a positive meeting with the federal minister last week. I was able to discuss with the minister what our customers are asking for. China, Hong Kong, Japan are all priority markets for agriculture, and we must do everything we can to sustain and build on these trade relations. That is what our competition is doing before us right now. The Asian market has specific demands. Age verification and traceability are the minimum requirements that these markets are demanding.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister. Mr. Speaker, market access is the issue. We need to know: what is the most important step for our producers to be able to take in order to access that market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's absolutely right. It now appears that the federal government and the industry have changed their position on market access to an incremental approach from their previous all-or-nothing policy. This means that we have an opportunity to enter the Asian market in a staged approach. This is a huge step. The federal minister and I agree that the best short- and long-term benefits to our beef industry are before us now. This is what I have been hearing from government and industry officials in Asia for the past two years. This is what we as a government and industry should be focusing our efforts on now.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. The Alberta livestock and meat strategy is a strategy he raised and introduced to our producers here in Alberta. Is the federal minister going to make this a Canada-wide initiative?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal minister certainly is in support of our strategy, and he committed to working with us to find areas where we can integrate the Alberta strategy into a national approach. I have always said that we should have a national approach, and I look forward to working with my federal counterpart. Age verification, traceability, special value-added products: this is what our markets want. That's what we've been trying to deliver through the livestock strategy. If this year's crop is not age verified, another year will be lost. Can our industry afford for that to happen? I think not.

The Speaker: When the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne next advocates on my behalf, would he add secondary road 801 and paving?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Support for Children with Disabilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a catch-22 in special-needs education right now. In order to receive proper programming, a child must first be tested and coded, but since there is a shortage of government-funded psychologists and psychometrists, children have to wait to get coded, meanwhile suffering through insufficient programming. To the Minister of Education: given that early diagnosis is key to the success of a child with special needs, like Ashley, who I introduced earlier, will this government commit to reallocating resources to reduce waiting times for psychological and psychometric testing?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Education has undertaken a review of that whole area chaired by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I would ask him, when he returns to the Assembly, to elaborate on the question from the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be very appreciative of the elaborations. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Many families feel that there is a severe disconnect between the supports that they receive for their children with disabilities from Children and Youth Services and those they receive from the Ministry of Education. Can the minister explain what type of interministerial collaboration there is between her ministry and the Ministry of Education to ensure consistency from the home to the school so that children don't fall through the cracks?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that in the past I've spoken to the work that's being done with Education, Health, and my ministry on the exact issues that you're talking about. One point I would like to make is that our family support for children with disabilities is a program that we are very proud of, and we survey on a regular basis the success rate of that. Almost 90 per cent of our parents are really pleased with the services that they get for their families. I think another telling sign is that out of over 8,000 families that we have accessing that program, we have an appeal process put in place for parents not satisfied with the level of service, and this year we have 22 appeals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. How does the minister respond to families who are allocated respite funding, yet the agencies that support them cannot find the staff to do the work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. One thing that we are working on and that our CFSAs are working on is increasing capacities in our local communities. I know that a couple of weeks ago the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and I had the opportunity to meet with the founding members of Families Who Care, a very good meeting. One of the issues that they had pointed out and that we had committed to taking a look at was on increasing options and flexibility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Family Violence

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November is Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta. Family violence is something that crosses all socioeconomic boundaries and affects people from all walks of life. Recently the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics released its annual report, stating that Alberta had the second-highest rate of spousal violence in Canada. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is his ministry doing about these disturbing rates of family violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is taking action to deal with the violence in Alberta. Last year we launched the Alberta relationship threat assessment and management initiative, or ARTAMI, as another initiative dedicated to reducing and preventing domestic violence and stalking. ARTAMI, a cross-government unit, has assisted on more than 160 cases and more than 50 formal threat assessments in the past year. They have also delivered more than 50 speaking, training, and information sessions to groups across this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what tools does his ministry provide to its front-line workers who must respond to family violence situations?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we're always looking for ways to enhance front-line policing in response to family violence situations. We recently developed the family violence investigative report, which helps alert police to situations that may require specific follow-up. Copies of this report and a training DVD have been distributed to police services across the province. We have also distributed copies of the Domestic Violence Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors as part of our ongoing front-line training. This handbook provides valuable information on domestic violence investigative procedures, prosecutions, witnesses and abusers, risk factors, and safety planning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: while these tools and initiatives are great for the respondents and workers who deal with family violence, what can I tell my constituents who are themselves victims of family violence?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we need every Albertan to become part of the solution. As much as we encourage victims to report family violence, calling 911 in crisis situations, we know there are many instances where these crimes go unreported, so we're calling the police. Calling the police is important because not only will they investigate the crime; they will refer the crime to the victim services unit. This unit is staffed and trained with caring people who offer information, assistance, and support during the police investigation and throughout the criminal process.

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

Homelessness (continued)

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over \$100 million and counting has gone to landlords via the government's direct rent supplement program, yet the number of homeless continues to increase. In Edmonton this year over 300 people are homeless, an increase of 18 per cent since 2006 and an increase of 300 per cent from 10 years ago. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The record number of homeless in Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton comes at the end of a peak of an economic cycle. Considering the troubled state of the economy, what steps will the minister take to ensure that homelessness throughout Alberta will not continue to rise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to correct the data that the member has brought forward regarding the increase in the number of homeless. I've had an opportunity to meet very often with Susan McGee, the director of Homeward Trust, who actually looked after the homeless count. I know that six years ago the homeless count increased by 79 per cent. Two years ago it increased by 39 per cent. This year it increased by 20 per cent. So as the homeless count increase goes down, you can see that the good programs we've got in place have helped to actually stabilize that count. Having said that, we will continue working with the organizations responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The dramatic increase in the number of homeless – 3,000 in Edmonton, to highlight last night – throughout Alberta highlights the failure of the government's policy of giving rent supplements to landlords. When will the government admit that that \$100 million would have been better spent building affordable housing and instituting rent caps instead of lining the pockets of landlords?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, that question tells me that I really need to meet with this hon. member and let him know what's real about the programs that we have because that is so way off base. I can tell you that I agree with Susan McGee. On Friday morning at the breakfast for national housing she said that with the homeless count being released that day, there really was a silver lining to the count. That's because we have sheltered 44 per cent of the increase with our programs. I can tell you as well that the programs are working, like the direct rent supplement program. So what was indicated here is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, the silver lining sounds more like a sow's ear.

Anyway, I've been told that the minister has already received the now nine-year plan to end homelessness from the secretariat. If this is the case, when will the minister release this plan?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go back to what was said about Susan McGee's view as the director of Homeward Trust, who's the head of 32 good organizations in the city of Edmonton and the good work that they do in this whole area of homelessness. I can tell you this: I trust what she said regarding the count this year. I went with the volunteers. I know what exactly

took place with the count, and I very much trust that information. Having said that, as I indicated, I will meet with this member and bring him up to date on what's occurring.

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

Nuclear Energy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April this government appointed a nuclear panel stacked with pro-nuclear academic and industry personnel. We were told that Albertans could expect to see a report by the fall. This very contentious issue deserves public scrutiny and debate in our Legislature. To the Minister of Energy. Albertans have had enough with secrets and closed doors. Only days remain in this fall session. Where's your report, and why won't you let us see it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, the member is absolutely correct that we did put a panel together to take a look at issues around nuclear energy development as it pertains to the province of Alberta. They were asked to answer a number of questions that I and all Albertans want answered. There is at this point in time ongoing work being done on the issue. There is not a report delivered to me at this point in time.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the interim I'm wondering if the minister could advise us. The Ontario government has handed billions of dollars over to the nuclear industry to subsidize this unviable, short-term energy source. Nowhere has nuclear energy succeeded without massive government subsidy. To the same minister. It's not a viable option, so is government prepared to say here and now that we will not be publicly subsidizing nuclear energy in Alberta, not one public penny, not ever?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very interesting concept indeed: not one public penny, not ever. I would not be able to answer that part of it. However, what I will say is that the economics around the nuclear issue as it relates to the province of Alberta is one of the questions that will be answered by the panel.

Ms Notley: So it sounds to me like the answer is yes.

Most experts believe that the world will run out of uranium in around 40 years but will never run out of wind or solar energy. To the same minister: given the many problems with nuclear power, why won't you shift government investment to renewable energy options instead of an option that creates radioactive waste that will threaten Albertans for tens of thousands of years?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the members opposite just clearly don't pay attention when we say anything about the energy industry in the province of Alberta. I have stood here on a number of occasions and said that the province of Alberta, the government of Alberta, is looking at all options. We lead Canada in a number of alternative energy options now, and we continue to work with all – all – options with respect to producing energy for Albertans.

Funding for Service Providers in Support Agencies

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I've heard concerns that Albertans with developmental disabilities are not getting the

supports they need because there aren't enough staff to provide them. We've all heard stories about people leaving jobs that support these Albertans for jobs with better pay at coffee shops and fast-food joints. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why aren't these support workers better paid for the important work they do in supporting Albertans with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, community agencies play a very valuable role delivering supports and services for people with developmental disabilities, and we're committed to helping them. The government has provided funding to agencies to help with staffing challenges, and this will continue to be a priority. Since 2005-06 our government through Seniors and Community Supports and Children and Youth Services has invested over \$106 million to help contracted agencies hire and keep staff.

Ms Woo-Paw: My supplemental question is to the same minister. One of the disability-related programs provided through your department is persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD. How much of the funding that you just mentioned would go to support workers for these programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the \$106 million, \$60 million has been provided for PDD program-funded agencies to address staffing issues. Budget '08-09 provided an increase of \$30 million for the PDD program to almost \$571 million in total to provide services for over 9,100 clients.

Ms Woo-Paw: My last question is to the same minister. Will you review the funding provided to support agencies so that workers get paid fairly for providing care to Albertans with developmental disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, setting the wages of support workers is an employer responsibility. My ministry provides funding to service providers for the supports provided to individuals, but we do not set the wages of the staff. Agencies make this decision based on their own operational priorities. Most agencies provided wage increases, and some agencies used a portion of the funding for things like training, development, and other incentives to help keep trained staff.

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

Provincial Fiscal Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the finance minister has commented, our economic situation is getting worse, but there is still no plan from this government to try to make things better: a refusal to save, a refusal to stop handing out money to golf courses, and a refusal to take any initiatives to protect the province from relying so heavily on a volatile revenue stream. My questions are to the minister of finance. Does the government plan to run a deficit budget as is being proposed by the Prime Minister, your federal cousins?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what public services is the government planning to cut to avoid the 40 per cent tax increase that was forecast in the Mintz report if the government cannot achieve savings?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we will table a budget in due course, and at that time we'll talk about the details of that budget.

Ms Blakeman: That's six months from now.

Again to the same minister: is the government considering a hiring freeze as part of its strategy to deal with the economic downturn?

Ms Evans: Today, Mr. Speaker, there were some 800 people in hall D at the Shaw Conference Centre. Myself along with Larry Pollock of the Canadian Western Bank, Dean Mike Percy, John Ferguson representing Suncor and the oil sands development, as well as Angus Watt from the National Bank talked in most glowing terms about how well Alberta is positioned, how well we're positioned given that we've paid down the debt and the fact that we're going to anticipate even more surplus than we budgeted when we released our budget this year. We were not talking about things being worse off in Alberta. We were talking about the impact of a global economy on all Canadians, in fact, on all people in the world.

Nuclear Power Expert Panel

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, a concerned constituent of mine contacted me about nuclear power as she has many concerns about it. Earlier this year the province announced the membership of a Nuclear Power Expert Panel. The work of this panel is obviously very important. My question to the Minister of Energy: what progress has been made by the panel so far, and when can we expect a report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the member that the work that this panel will do is, indeed, very important. As you know, I've asked them to put together a comprehensive, fact-based report, which will help, I think, guide consultations with Albertans at a later date. Sometime toward the end of this year, as I've indicated before, or perhaps in the first quarter of '09 we would expect to see the results of the panel's work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what has been done to ensure that this panel will be an objective group that will best ensure a balanced report back to government?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans, as I've said, want answers to some of the very same questions that I want answers to, that this government wants answers to. We think that the people that we've put on this panel are respected individuals in their own right, and we believe that the government has made it very clear that full consideration of both the potential challenges and advantages of the nuclear industry would need to be considered and reflected in the report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is good that nuclear energy is being looked into thoroughly, but certainly there are better

options for energy sources that should be extensively explored. My final question again to the Minister of Energy: looking beyond nuclear power, can the minister give me some specific examples of what has been done to look into new and innovative energy sources in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think I kind of alluded to an answer to that question a bit earlier on. Quite honestly, Alberta is leading some jurisdictions in alternate energy. We now are working very diligently with people in the wind power industry, biogeneration. We've got a good program in place, and it's coming forward. We're looking at many opportunities with respect to hydro in the province of Alberta. We're doing geothermal mapping of the possibilities for geothermal energy in the province. We're working ahead on all fronts with respect to energy for Albertans.

Anthony Henday Drive Public-private Partnership

Mr. MacDonald: P3s are a very bad deal for taxpayers. This past July the government locked in taxpayers to a deal to build, operate, maintain, and rehabilitate the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road here in Edmonton. This deal, which expires in 2041, puts millions of dollars of debt back on the balance sheet of this province. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why did the government lock taxpayers into this 33-year contract last July at boom-time prices when the construction boom was at its very peak?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very simple: it was one heck of a good deal for taxpayers. We did the market comparator study. It came out that that was the best route to go. What the hon. member is forgetting is that there are 30 years of warranty that go with this project, and we'd be paying those maintenance fees that we're going to be paying regardless of if we do it as a P3 or if we did it conventionally.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That's interesting.

Again to the same minister: why are operations and maintenance payments over the next 33 years indexed to inflation for this P3 project when AISH clients see their benefits decline in real terms over the period? Why do you have this special deal for these contractors, and you won't give the same deal to AISH citizens?

2:30

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, for the length of time that I've been in this Assembly, I've seen our AISH recipients get raises every time that, I guess, we've looked the thing over.

Mr. MacDonald: For the record, AISH clients do not get the same sweet deal that this contractor got in this operations and maintenance contract.

Again to the same minister: why did the government for this P3 project lock in all construction changes for labour at an additional 20 per cent and on materials at an additional 15 per cent regardless of the true cost of the changes? Why that sweet deal?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely sure on the 15 and 20 per cent he's talking about. I'll have to check into it and get back to the hon. member.*

*See p. 2059, right col., para. 8

Seniors' Housing

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population is aging, and it is expected that the number of seniors in the province will increase by more than 40 per cent, or over a half a million, in a decade's time. This demographic change will require government and society as a whole to develop programs and services to meet the changing needs of an aging population. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Fundamental to healthy aging is availability of housing that meets the needs of seniors. What is the government doing to address the need for more supportive seniors' housing in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the government has been proactively addressing this need. Improving the quality, supply, and client choice in the continuing care system is a top priority of this government. In fact, it's one of the Premier's mandates. This includes supportive living options that provide a combination of accommodations and support services. This year we allocated \$78 million through the affordable supportive living initiative to help develop more than 800 supportive living units. With budget targets of \$100 million over the next two years we hope to increase those numbers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you. My first supplemental question is for the same minister. I am pleased to hear the money is available through this program, but who is eligible to receive it?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, through the affordable supportive living initiative, the ASLI program, municipalities, not-for-profit organizations, housing management bodies, and private-sector companies are invited to submit proposals for the development of new supportive living units. This government has provided highly successful programs which have contributed capital funding to help develop more than 4,800 affordable supportive living units across Alberta since 1999.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. What about seniors' lodges? Are they also eligible for funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that the lodge modernization and improvement program has \$15.6 million available to provide one-time funding to housing management bodies to help modernize lodges. Detailed information about both of these programs and project submission applications are available on the Alberta website. Last Monday, November 17, was the closing date for this year's programs.

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

Wait-list Registry

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has come to light that the Minister of Health and Wellness was providing false or inaccurate information to the public on the Alberta wait-list registry website earlier this month. Can the minister tell us when the wait-list registry will be posting accurate and up-to-date wait-list times?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any inaccurate information. If the member would like to provide me with what she believes is inaccurate, then I would follow up on it.

Ms Pastoor: I guess the follow-up question to that would be: why is this information not verified for accuracy before it goes on there, and why is a disclaimer necessary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have to have an answer to the first question before I'd respond to the supplementary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Could you elaborate on exactly where the breakdown was in the communication of the wait-list times?

Mr. Liepert: Again, Mr. Speaker, I need the information that she's referring to before I can respond to the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Weed and Feed Ban

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently this government announced that at the beginning of January 2010 it's going to ban the use of herbicide-fertilizer combination products in Alberta. Many citizens in Lethbridge use these products. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why are we banning these products at this time?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely accurate. There was an announcement to remove weed and feed products from the marketplace in 2010. But I want to make it clear that we're not banning pesticides, nor are we banning fertilizers. What we're banning is a product that combines the two. The reason for that is that in doing so, you end up applying about 10 times more pesticide than what's required. We've been doing testing of our rivers for about 10 years now, and the indication is that the amount of pesticide evident in our rivers downstream of major urban municipalities is increasing, and this is a proactive move to turn that trend around.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Are products used by rural property owners and counties to eliminate harmful and noxious weeds going to be affected by this ban?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that they will not. As I mentioned, we're not banning the use of pesticides. We're banning the use of a combination, premixed product that is purchased in a premixed form. I understand that it would be impractical to use such a product on a large scale if for no other reason than it would be prohibitively expensive. Rural Albertans will continue to have access to the commercial weed-control products that they currently use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Are any other bans being considered for other weed-control products?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, at this time there are no other bans that are planned. We have, however, indicated that while this is a matter primarily of federal jurisdiction on the licensing of products, we recognize that there are a number of municipalities throughout the province that are looking at, for one reason or another, local bylaws that apply to the application of pesticides and herbicides. While I can assure the member that at this point there is no further discussion with respect to provincial legislation, there may be some municipalities that want to give it further consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the persons with developmental disabilities program, or PDD, provides funding to support approximately 9,100 adult Albertans with developmental disabilities. Some of these individuals have very complex needs and behavioural issues which can make them more prone to hurting themselves and others. My question to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what are you doing to ensure Albertans with behavioural problems receive care, are funded through your ministry, and don't harm other Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we fully recognize that adult Albertans with developmental disabilities who have behavioural, mental health, or other complex needs require specialized supports. I can advise you that some agencies are providing specialized training for staff who support individuals with complex needs. As well, our staff continue to work with other programs, services, and organizations to co-ordinate supports and to ensure the right supports are in place when they are needed by Albertans with disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's comforting to know that the workers that provide these supports are trained, but ensuring the safety of Albertans in these situations likely requires a broader approach. Is there anything else being done to protect the safety of Albertans with developmental disabilities and those around them?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, from studying best practices, we know that individuals with complex needs are best supported through a continuum of supports. As a result, supports are often provided in partnership with other professionals and other community resources. As I mentioned previously, my ministry is working with other departments to develop more collaborative strategies to better support individuals with complex needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. It seems the highest level of concern for the safety of PDD clients and those around them is related to mental health issues. To the same minister: what can be done to ensure the safety of Albertans with developmental disabilities and those around them in any of these situations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In some cases these Albertans may require short periods of hospitalization to stabilize

their behaviours. When planning the move from a psychiatric hospital to the community, we try to ensure a smooth transition by assessing the risk for the individual and for the community. We also continue to explore ways to manage these situations in a structured community setting and work to further protect the safety of individuals with complex needs and Albertans around them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today.

Before calling Orders of the Day in the Routine, I will be inviting the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness for a statement and will deal with two points of order. Right now we will take a brief break before going on to the continuation of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

ICE 2008 Information Technology Conference

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Technology and innovation are critical to the success of Alberta's future prosperity and quality of life. Earlier this month I represented the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology at the ICE 2008 technology conference. I was pleased to present to the conference that technology is key to the future of this province, that Alberta understands the challenges and is proactive in addressing them.

ICT is our society's electronic nervous system. This is why our government supports an aggressive strategy to make Alberta a leader in ICT research, technology commercialization, and the use of ICT products and services. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, an IT workforce shortage exists not only in Alberta but all across North America. IT education and careers are not viewed as attractive by young people, and as a result enrolments in IT-related postsecondary programs are declining. Attracting, developing, and retaining talent is the top challenge facing technology organizations and is emerging as a major theme in building Alberta's next generation economy.

In October a multimedia campaign was launched to raise awareness and change perception about IT careers among students and the general public. This campaign is reaching a young audience through the Internet, buttons, postcards, TV, LRT, and bus shelter ads. I urge all of you to please take the buttons on your desk and wear them proudly as you spread the message of the exciting opportunities that IT careers present.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary Stampeders' Grey Cup Victory

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that reference has been made today to a certain exciting event, but good news is worth sharing again, especially if it's done in new and different ways. It's an honour to rise today on behalf of so many other members, including our hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, to congratulate the Calgary Stampeders Football Club on being crowned the winners of the 96th Canadian Football League Grey Cup.

It was a hard-won, well-deserved victory in front of a somewhat hostile home crowd, the second largest in CFL history, who cheered the Montreal Alouettes on to a 13-10 halftime lead. But the red and white turned the table, outscoring the red, white, and blue 12 to 1 in the second half. The 22 to 14 final score was sweet vindication for

the horsemen, who were shut out of the individual season awards despite numerous and impressive individual and team efforts and records, including the most wins in the most competitive division in CFL history. When it came right down to it, the 2008 Stampeders won the only reward that really mattered, and that was the national championship. It was the ultimate road trip. It brought to life the age-old phrase “veni, vidi, vici”: we came; we saw; we conquered.

Like the greatest of victories, this one was the result of an incredible team effort, which included amazing performances from the most valuable player quarterback, Henry Burris, the most outstanding Canadian kicker, Sandro DeAngelis, and every single player on the team. Kudos also go out to the coaching staff, the front-office employees, management personnel, ownership group, and ever-loyal fans.

Now, as a loyal season ticket holder myself I look forward to supporting the team and the community as we play host to next year’s championship. With President Scott Ackles and the organizing committee at the helm along with support from our government ministries, including Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Culture and Community Spirit, I’m completely confident that Calgary and CFL fans from across the province will join together to host Canada’s best Grey Cup festival ever. You know about Calgary’s rich history with the Grey Cup going back to ’48, when we had the only perfect season. We capped it with a win over the Ottawa Rough Riders, turning Toronto into a party zone and launching the first Grey Cup festival. I know we’re going to rejuvenate that spirit next year. Let’s see those Stampeders back in it again.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling over 1,200 signatures which state:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, object to the development and use of nuclear power in Alberta, and we petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to develop an energy policy which encourages conservation, promotes the use of safe, clean, renewable energy sources and explicitly rejects nuclear power in this province.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to table a petition with over 1,200 signatures on it, different ones, I believe. The petition, like the last one, urges the government of Alberta to “develop an energy policy which encourages conservation, promotes the use of safe, clean, renewable energy sources and explicitly rejects nuclear power in this province.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: I sincerely hope, hon. member, that this is a different petition.

Ms Notley: Indeed, it is.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 52

Health Information Amendment Act, 2008

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2008.

This bill will bring the Health Information Act up to 2008 standards with the advent of technology. It will protect the private information of all individuals and move us forward. I move first reading of Bill 52.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 52 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I have two tablings today. These are in reference to a question that he asked last week. The first is a photographic recording of a presentation of a cheque by the Member for Highwood, the minister of agriculture, in a joint presentation of funds to the Foothills Country Hospice, funded by himself and the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, the Minister of SRD.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is entitled Hey MLA, Where’s the Money? This is coming from, I think, a website blog and is on the same issue that was raised in a question last week on funding of lottery programs.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of a CBC news story today on carbon capture and storage and a page from the document on CCS that the CBC received through a freedom of information request. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to these documents in his questions today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first is a set of 13 e-mails received from across the province from Tom Lambert, Christopher Leong, Sarah Christensen, Heather Walker, Lisa Lambert, Kelda Mikalson, Evelyn Violini, Tasha Diamant, Christine Michell, Stacey Schiebelbein, Teresa Grice, Brigitte Roy, and Karen Smith calling upon the government to commit to full funding for the safe visitation pilot program and its expansion across the province so that all children are safe. These individuals want to avoid further tragic murder-suicides as occurred earlier this year in Drumheller.

2:50

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a brochure, which I picked up last Friday while helping to launch the Salvation Army Christmas kettle campaign, which runs from November 19 through December 24. In 2007 over 2,000 families received Christmas hampers thanks to 1,500 volunteers who provided 12,000 hours to raise \$1,101,980. Please give generously to the Salvation Army red kettle campaign.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’m pleased to table with the Assem-

bly the 2007 annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2007. This report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year 2006-2007 and the 2007 annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I have forwarded by mail today a copy to all members.

Thursday last there were two little issues that we dealt with. First of all, the chair asked the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to review certain actions she had in the House. She has done it. She has found the errors of her way, and we'll move on with that one.

Point of Order **Referring to a Nonmember**

The Speaker: The chair invited the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to review a certain matter and if he wished to participate on Monday. I'll now invite him to.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, November 20, I was asked in this Assembly why no representative of the Friends of Medicare had been appointed to the board of Alberta Health Services. My response has raised concern among members of the opposition, who have suggested I disclosed confidential information about an applicant. In this case I did not identify the applicant by name, and I have to say that I am somewhat surprised about the suggestion that his application was confidential.

In June I took the time to meet with this individual personally, at which time he advised me that he was planning on applying for the Alberta Health Services Board, and I encouraged him to do so. A few days later I felt it was necessary to contact this same individual after he had discussed with the media some other issues from our conversation, a conversation which I felt was held in confidence. When I asked him about it, he advised me that he did not consider our discussion in my office to have been held in confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I have not been personally contacted by this individual expressing concern, but if, in fact, he did not apply for a board position, as he indicated to me in a conversation which he says was not confidential, and/or if he was not one of the 70 individuals interviewed as I presumed that he was when I made the comments in this House last Thursday, then I would ask him to do so, and I would deal with it accordingly. Otherwise, I have nothing further to add.

The Speaker: Earlier today the Leader of the Official Opposition indicated his intent to rise on a point of order. I take it the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre wishes to partake as a surrogate.

Point of Order **Factual Accuracy**

Ms Blakeman: I do, indeed, sir. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition and in my capacity as the House leader for the Official Opposition I would like to bring a point of order forward. Earlier today in question period there was an exchange between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Minister of Health and Wellness. As fast as I could write it down and as close as I could get it, it was around the member, meaning directed at the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, when he commits to spending his lottery funds.

Mr. Speaker, the citations that I'm using here – there are two of them – are 23(h), which is around making allegations against another member. Essentially, the allegation that somehow the Official Opposition members enjoy the same access to lottery funds and the same decision-making powers and ability to distribute those lottery funds as members of the government do is simply not true. I suspect

the minister knew that when he said it because, in fact, we have raised that issue in this House a number of times previously. I can say that in my 12 years of serving in this Assembly, I have never been consulted nor have any of the members that I have spoken with in my own caucus and in previous caucuses, those being the 24th Legislature, the 25th Legislature, the 26th Legislature, and, of course, this one. We have never had any communication from any of the appropriate ministries dealing with lottery funds beyond our initial support letter that we are often requested to write by the community organization in support of a particular project.

Let me be very specific here, Mr. Speaker. Neither myself nor any of the colleagues that I've been able to survey have ever been asked to attend a meeting, to talk about a specific grant for an organization in any of the constituencies that have been held by opposition members. We have never been invited by telephone to participate in any discussion about the amount of the grant that's being allocated or the prioritization of the grants in our constituencies, whether more money should be granted than was asked for or less money should be granted than was asked for. We have never been given any additional information or invitation to participate in any way, shape, or form. We have never been invited to have a consultation on constituency priorities as was discussed in the weblog and in the newspaper article around the commentary of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in which he outlines in some detail his priorities and how he's setting them for his constituency using that lottery money.

Again, we've never been asked for any kind of a consultation on the amount of a grant or any opportunity to consolidate grants or contribute in a joint fashion with any of my colleagues in the Official Opposition, where we would've pooled money in support of a particular grant application.

We've also never been given the opportunity to present cheques for a photo opportunity, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the one time in my constituency where a group phoned me thinking I had been invited for a cheque presentation, the photo op was immediately cancelled so that it was not possible that I would be present when the government member from outside of the constituency came to do the cheque presentation. We have never been involved in a photo opportunity in that way. In fact, even for the one that was mentioned in the House the other day with the cheque presentation for the Art Gallery of Alberta, which is in my riding, it was the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs that was invited to present a cheque, a member of the government, not myself.

The Speaker: Perhaps we might get to the point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm going over in as much detail as I can, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, but you're not dealing with the point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, the point of order is around the Minister of Health and Wellness making an allegation that, in fact, the Leader of the Official Opposition or any member of this opposition has the same access, influence, participation, or opportunity to distribute lottery funds that members of the government do. I'm going through very carefully because this is an important matter, Mr. Speaker.

On the other hand, we have shown and I, in fact, just tabled information showing that government MLAs are constantly presenting lottery cheques both in opposition MLA ridings and in their own ridings.

Now, the second citation I'd like to use is 23(i), in which the member is imputing false or unavowed motives to another member;

in other words, that we had this ability to influence lottery decisions and were somehow mocking the minister because of that. I'll be very clear here. The minister did directly reference the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He didn't say, well, "anybody over there" or "the members opposite" or "someone from the opposition caucus." He did use the pronoun "his," and he was in a direct question-and-answer period with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

So we do not have the same access to those lottery funds, and the minister, I'm sure, knows it. If he doesn't, then I have just been able to go through and I think with a small amount of detail illustrate that we do not in fact have that same access and that it's something that we have been trying to draw to the government's attention for some time. If the minister did misunderstand, perhaps I've been able to clarify for him, and if he did understand, then perhaps he would like to admit that he did make an allegation that, in fact, was not true and that he had no support to make.

Thank you for the opportunity to present that point of order regarding the exchange between the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Leader of the Official Opposition, using 23(h) and (i).

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this point of order.

Mr. Liepert: That's correct, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I would just briefly state that I don't believe there is a point of order here, but what I will say is that I probably misspoke in terms of the words that I used. What words I should have used and I would be happy to use at this time are that if the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and, I would suggest, the Member for Edmonton-Centre would like to advocate to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit that we do not allocate any lottery dollars to their constituencies, that all of those dollars that would normally be allocated by the minister to those constituencies go to Calgary for beds for cancer, we'd be very happy to have that money come to Calgary.

I would be happy to withdraw my comments, Mr. Speaker, on the provision that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Opposition, withdraw his comments which related something like this: "Each Tory MLA has about \$750,000 in lottery funds to distribute every year. If the Tory MLAs from Calgary pooled their lottery slush funds for this year," and he goes on.

I would suggest that if I'm withdrawing my comments, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw his comments because they are clearly incorrect based on the information that the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has consistently stated in this Legislature: MLAs do not direct those funds; they can advocate on behalf of their constituents relative to particular projects for lottery funds.

Again, I would state, Mr. Speaker, that if any opposition member would like to advocate that the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit not allocate any lottery funds to their constituency, that it should all be sent to Calgary for cancer beds, we would be more than happy to accept those dollars in Calgary.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate on this point of order? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Don't be so glum, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief.

The Speaker: Sorry. Don't bring me into your argument. Okay? Just leave me out of this.

Mr. Chase: Fine.

Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear that we want to see

community lottery boards reinstated so that the people in the community decide how best to expend the money within their communities. We have made that abundantly clear. The system was fair because it was the individuals in the community that made the decisions, not an appointee or a minister of the government. That is what we maintain, and that is why this point of order was raised.

We have no special circumstance, nor do we wish to have a special circumstance. That is for the members of the community to decide, and that is why community lottery boards should be reinstated.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health clarified his remarks. The Opposition House Leader has talked about 23(h) and 23(i) with respect to allegations and false motives, and clearly neither applies. It was a bit of a stretch at the best of times to use those particular references. I would suggest to you that there's no point of order here. Clearly, we're entering into a realm of debate that is totally unrelated to the alleged point of order, and I think it should be dismissed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, here is what was said in these two questions today. First of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Well, Mr. Speaker, people in Calgary and southern Alberta are desperate for cancer treatment. They can't get it because the facilities aren't there. Each Tory MLA has about \$750,000 in lottery funds to distribute every year. If the Tory MLAs from Calgary pooled their lottery slush funds for this year and next, they could pay for these new cancer beds. To the minister of health: will he ask the Tory MLAs from Calgary to pool their lottery slush funds and pay for the cancer treatment beds their city so badly needs?

The response of the Minister of Health and Wellness:

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd consider that, but only after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview commits to spending his lottery dollars for his constituency in Calgary.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Point of order. Thank you.

The chair has now heard four participants with respect to this. Quite frankly, what we've had is a debate with respect to facts, a disagreement of facts, and opinion with respect to facts. The chair finds nothing in here that was a breach of any of the rules that we have in terms of the comment from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

However, having said that, there is certainly enough in this statement from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to have had the chair intervene and rule the question out of order under Oral Questions, 409: "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate." Clearly, there are about three of those words that apply to it. Sometimes it's best just to let things go the way they are without raising them.

This is not a point of order, and we've now dealt with this matter.

Now the hon. Minister of Energy. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you going to be the surrogate on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?

Ms Notley: Yes, I am.

The Speaker: Please proceed, then, on your point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to bring this point of order issue forward. Again, it is my view that there has been a breach of order under section 23 of the standing

orders. That breach essentially related to an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the hon. Minister of Energy.

Unfortunately, I don't have the *Hansard* with me, but in essence the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made in total, I believe, about three statements. He referred to a government document as secret. He referenced a quote from that document that said that only a small percentage of emitted CO₂ is capturable. That was in relation to the tar sands. He quoted from a Dr. Keith, outlining that Dr. Keith had said that rational people should not rely on CCS for tar sands reductions.

Now, I'm not sure exactly which of those points ultimately resulted in the Minister of Energy responding by saying that he is telling lies. I'm not sure if he said that the member is telling lies or he is telling lies, but the phrase was "telling lies" in relation to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Since the questions, I've tabled the documents upon which the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood relied, and I believe they support the veracity, certainly, or the intent of the statements initially made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The sections of the standing order which I believe are relevant here are sections 23(h), (i), and (j), that it's a breach if one member

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member; [and]
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder.

Beauchesne refers in general to this issue. I'll just quote 494, on page 151: "It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible." It would be my argument that the phrase "the member is telling lies" – and, again, I don't know exactly the way it was phrased as I don't have the *Hansard* with me – goes that extra step and imputes false or bad intention.

I would also note, of course, that there have been, over the course of the last 20 or 30 years, at least 30, probably well over 30, rulings that the use of the word "lying" in different contexts is either unparliamentary or, alternatively, members have withdrawn their statements before that ruling could be made.

We would be very pleased if the member in question could be brought to order or, alternatively, if the minister would offer an apology or withdraw his statement. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, do you wish to participate?
3:10

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I certainly would not risk testing your very good nature with respect to these issues, but if I might, I have a couple of comments. The member referred to a document that he said was our own briefing; in other words, this government's briefing. It is not. Prepared by the federal government. He selectively referred to a point in the briefing and neglected to indicate that the prior point in the same briefing says that "the focus should be to build a few commercial-scale fully integrated . . . projects by 2012-2015," which is exactly what this government is doing. Finally, he did hold up a report and called it secret.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things I'd like to point out there. Number one, if it's secret, how did he get it? Secondly, this was posted on Alberta Energy's website along with a news release in January.

All of these facts aside, I did indeed use the term "lies" in this Assembly, and I recognize that it's not in line, it's not proper conduct, does not suit the rules of this House, and I would like to withdraw the remark.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. That's the honourable thing to do.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, okay?

This is not the first time this was used today. It so happened that the hon. Minister of Energy said this, but then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East in her question basically said words like the minister has been "providing false or inaccurate information." That's a direct accusation, which violates the rules again.

The fact of the matter is that this chair could probably intervene 40 times during the question period. There would be very few questions and fewer answers. Again, you've got to discipline yourselves. I've said before, a long time ago, that I have too much respect for the hon. members in this Assembly to actually be the disciplinarian. That's a responsibility of each and every member, not the chair.

I believe that covers everything today.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to moving to private members' business, I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 8(1) in order to briefly revert to Government Bills and Orders so as to allow the President of the Treasury Board to present a message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan be tabled. On November 18 the Minister of Finance and Enterprise tabled the 2008-09 quarterly budget report for the second quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. The quarterly report tabled by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise provides the framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and the 14 departments of government.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide additional spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the 14 departments of government. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$958 million in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases and \$38.2 million in voted capital investment. These estimates will also authorize a \$20 million increase in the lottery fund payments and authorize transfers of \$20.4 million of the previously approved spending authority between departments.

Government Motions

21. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion if there are participants who wish to participate.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. This was the motion to . . .

The Speaker: Refer it to committee.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: I take it, then, the question can be called.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

22. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund shall be one day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 61(9) this motion is not debatable, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

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

Bill 208 Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. McFarland]

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. I understand the member's intent with this bill and would like to thank him for helping to continue the discussion on affordable housing solutions. It can be a very valuable exercise to review and assess our policies and programs in many areas, and affordable housing is no exception, but I would like to suggest that this government has already been doing so and has been using these results to continue to address affordable housing in real and meaningful ways.

One of the most valuable of these reviews took place only recently. In February of 2007 the Affordable Housing Task Force was created to recommend innovative and cost-effective measures to make affordable housing more available and accessible in Alberta. To support these efforts, the task force consulted with municipal governments, businesses, industry associations, political parties, not-for-profits, and community leaders. The task force came back with eight major recommendations, and the Alberta government responded with several initiatives.

I'd like to outline some of the steps that the Alberta government has taken to improve access to affordable housing. Based on a task force recommendation to enhance capital resources for affordable housing, the Alberta government responded with \$196 million for this purpose. Some of this money was to be distributed to municipalities, allowing them to independently address growth and affordability issues. This had and has the benefit of allowing municipalities to direct resources where they believe it would do the most good.

An additional \$45 million was also allocated for the creation of 300 affordable housing units in Wood Buffalo to support the growth caused by oil sands development. Meanwhile, the government nearly doubled the rent supplement program, providing funding directly to individuals as a timely and efficient solution to move Alberta residents into affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, the task force also made recommendation on ways to aid the homeless for those seeking transitional housing. One of those recommendations was to increase funding for temporary emergency homeless shelter spaces. Shelter allowances were set at \$35 million, a \$12 million increase, and the Alberta homeless initiative funding was doubled to total \$6 million.

There were also steps taken to find housing for those in transition. These individuals may include those living with disabilities, mental illness, or addiction, women escaping domestic abuse, and our youth. The task force recommended that an Alberta transitional housing initiative be established and funded to address some of the challenges these individuals may face. The Alberta government responded here as well, Mr. Speaker, by committing to this initiative in providing \$2.5 million in support services for individuals needing transitional housing.

3:20

It is worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that among the task force recommendations was a program that mirrors Bill 208. This recommendation was ultimately rejected because the Alberta government believes that the creation of more rental units is a better way to address affordable housing. In fact, based on recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force, the government committed to supporting the development of 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear that this government has been and continues to be working hard to make housing attainable and affordable for all Albertans, particularly those in need. What is more, the government is continuing to review current programs, increase resources where necessary, and consider innovation where it is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting Bill 208, not because I do not believe that home ownership is a worthwhile goal but because resources are better spent on ensuring that every Albertan has access to affordable housing. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. This bill would create a body within the Alberta government to act as a guarantor on the down payment portion of a mortgage.

Mr. Speaker, we have experienced unprecedented growth in this province, and a number of Albertans have had concerns regarding affordable housing. Bill 208 intends to help alleviate these concerns by creating additional means to assist Albertans with the purchase of a home. This assistance is intended for those individuals who find

themselves unable to qualify for a mortgage based on current lending criteria.

Mr. Speaker, home ownership is a source of pride for many Albertans, so I can understand why the Member for Lethbridge-West has brought this legislation forward, and I can appreciate his intent in doing so. However, we have to keep in mind why lending institutions have lending criteria that individuals must meet in order to qualify for a mortgage. Lenders have to ensure that the applicant has the financial capacity to carry the mortgage, something that protects both the lender and the borrower. The two primary factors currently used by lending institutions to determine this capacity are income levels and credit ratings. While this may preclude some Albertans from obtaining a mortgage, it helps ensure that those who purchase a home have the means to keep it.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of programs and financial supports currently available to assist individuals to purchase a home in addition to providing access to affordable housing. One of the most recognizable is the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, commonly known as the CMHC. As Canada's national housing agency the CMHC provides assistance in a number of areas, including mortgage insurance, repairs and renovations, accessibility modifications, home adaptations, and low-income housing.

Mr. Speaker, the CMHC has grown to become Canada's premier provider of mortgage loan insurance. In fact, it has done so for 1 in 3 homes purchased in Canada over the last 52 years. This assistance is significant because it protects the lender from mortgage defaults while allowing those who are unable to put more than 5 per cent down on the purchase price of a property to purchase a home. Saving for a 5 per cent down payment may not always be an easy task, but it's often an important indicator of whether or not an individual has the budgetary ability and the means to carry a mortgage for the long term.

Furthermore, the CMHC offers a number of programs to help ensure that affordable housing is available to meet the needs of Albertans, five of which are relevant to the discussion today. The first is the homeowner residential rehabilitation assistance program, which offers financial support to low-income households who own and occupy substandard housing. Mr. Speaker, this program enables individuals to perform repairs that improve the living conditions of the property yet allows them to stay living in their home while doing so.

Second, the residential rehabilitation assistance program offers assistance to low-income homeowners and landlords with disabilities. Primarily, it enables them to make the renovations necessary to improve accessibility and, therefore, a greater level of independence.

Third, the home adaptation for seniors' independence program helps homeowners and landlords pay for minor home adaptations, allowing low-income seniors to live in their home independently for much longer.

Fourth, the emergency repair program assists low-income homeowners or renters in rural areas, allowing them to make emergency repairs for the continued safe occupancy of their homes.

Finally, the rental residential rehabilitation assistance program offers financial support specifically to landlords of affordable housing. This assistance goes a long way to ensuring the completion of mandatory repairs to self-contained units occupied by low-income tenants.

Mr. Speaker, these five examples are among a number of programs that currently exist to help Albertans access affordable and comfortable housing accommodations. While home ownership may be considered an ideal situation to some, the way in which Bill 208 would provide affordable housing would increase the risk for

borrowers and lenders alike. While I support the intentions of Bill 208, I believe there are adequate programs available to assist potential homebuyers and provide affordable housing. For this reason I will not be supporting Bill 208.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional members? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the intent of Bill 208, Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, but I think, as the hon. member who preceded me has indicated, there are better ways to accomplish affordable housing. One is something that the government's Affordable Housing Task Force recommended, and that was the idea of requiring a cap to be placed on rental properties. If that cap were in fact placed, the individuals who were in an apartment or a leasing circumstance would be able to set aside money to achieve their own first mortgage down payment, and that would provide individuals an opportunity for a hand up as opposed to a handout.

Why that particular recommendation was rejected I am not sure, but as our economy heads south – and I use that both because it is from the south direction that a lot of our financial crisis has arrived but also because while the average price of a house has declined over the last number of months, it's still far from being affordable – the people who are most vulnerable, that are most likely to lose the roofs under which they are currently living, are the individuals who are paying far more than 30 per cent of their earnings in rent. Again, I would call upon the government to reconsider what their task force had recommended, and that was basically the ongoing rate of inflation plus allowing landlords approximately a 10 per cent top-up so that they would be assured of a return.

Also within the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendation was the requirement that if landlords could justify an increase based on improvements made to their dwelling or the need for emergency services in the event of a flood or some type of environmental negative occurrence, there would be a justification for those rent increases. That kind of circumstance of protecting the most vulnerable would then, as I say, rise up unlike the recommendation that the government has made, that all boats rise with the tide. In this particular case, those individuals would be able to move up various steps in terms of the affordability ladder to the point where they would be able to potentially set aside money for their first mortgage.

What I see in Bill 208 is very similar to what got the United States government and a number of mortgage companies and reached up into the banks, the idea of subprime mortgages that didn't bear any kind of reality to the ongoing prices in the market. I would hate to think that the government would get burned in the same way they did with the Treasury Branches' asset-backed commercial paper with providing subprime mortgages, which the taxpayers would be on the hook to pay out in the case of default. That is not where, I'm sure, the mover of Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, had intended to go, but that is the possibility. We are seeing a downturn in our economy, and this, basically, creates a liability for taxpayers that I'm sure they would be unwilling to take on. As a representative of the constituents of Calgary-Varsity I could not in good conscience support this motion.

3:30

In Calgary-Varsity we have a number of different styles of apartments, of condominiums, of low-cost housing, of what I would call almost tenement circumstances. We have illegal fourplexes

operating because that's the only type of housing that a number of students at the University of Calgary can afford. The Alberta government has ample opportunity to correct this current circumstance. I mentioned rent controls as a possibility. Another possibility is a moratorium on condominium conversion. But also there are possibilities of the Alberta government providing land for affordable housing to be built upon. There is also the possibility of changing the municipal act to require a certain percentage of affordable housing to be built in new communities.

These are all very positive, supportive methods that the Alberta government could undertake that would not cost taxpayers anything because the extra land that the government would provide, hopefully at a dollar or donate in terms of a grant to the municipalities, would go a long way to achieving affordable housing. There are organizations that the government, I would say, would be well supported in terms of providing economic grants to, and that's organizations like the Calgary land trust. The Calgary land trust acquires land upon which affordable housing is built.

Organizations that I have brought forward previously in this Assembly that I have worked with are the Habitat for Humanity projects, whereby \$60,000 can be levied through volunteer labour, through philanthropic donations, and be turned into an affordable house. I've participated, as I say, in the housing that was built along 16th Avenue where the old Highlander Hotel occurred, and that's just one of the numerous Habitat for Humanity projects. Habitat for Humanity is able to work with building supply companies to get reduced rates. As I've mentioned before, while it has a core of trained individuals who have the skills to read blueprints and the carpentry skills, the plumbing, et cetera, these individuals are able to build houses at a considerably reduced cost based on, to a large extent, volunteer labour which is guided by foremen with the necessary knowledge. I know I learned a tremendous amount in working on that particular project.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I indicated last week in a tabling an exciting affordable home project that Trico, with another housing company in Calgary, with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and with the Committee to End Homelessness worked on together. I very much appreciate some of these very creative projects that private companies such as Trico Homes, which has a terrific reputation in Calgary for building not only in terms of quality but affordability, have undertaken.

This Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, while it has good intentions, the method of delivering those intentions puts unreasonable liability on the Alberta taxpayers and, as a result, is doomed to failure. Affordable housing is an absolute necessity in this province as we go further toward a recession in Alberta. When we get beyond the point of the \$7 billion sustainability fund providing us a buffer, when we address the actual debt in terms of unfunded pension liabilities, in terms of \$12 billion of an infrastructure deficit, when we finally, if we can, pay for 30- and 32-year P3 mortgages, whether on roads or schools, we're going to have to pay out a terrific amount of money. What little potentially we've saved in the heritage trust fund is likely to be eaten into, which is a great shame that we haven't in our good times set aside the money to protect us in the lean times. But the reality is that this government has a debt before it almost approaching \$23 billion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak fairly briefly on Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act. Bill 208 would create a body within the Alberta government to provide mortgage insurance on the down payment portion of a mortgage. It has targeted those who are financially able to pay the cost of a mortgage but do not qualify based on the criteria set out by the lending institution, including but not limited to income level or credit rating. This would allow them not only to experience the pride of ownership but also a level of security previously unattainable. Enabling individuals to contribute monthly payments to the cost of a mortgage rather than a rental property creates the potential for innovation in affordable housing.

Mortgages are the primary means by which people finance the purchase of a home. A mortgage is a loan agreement wherein the lender loans money to the borrower to purchase property under the condition that the borrower promises to repay the loan and provides that land as security for the payment for the loan. If the borrower defaults on that loan, the lender may take the security in order to satisfy the debt owing to it. CMHC is the primary lender in Canada. They have a formula where they expect no more than 30 per cent of your income should go for housing costs, and that includes utilities and other costs.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the bill is very well meaning, but I think that there are a lot of difficulties in encouraging potential homeowners to get in over their heads by extending credit to levels that can easily cause financial problems if they should experience an unexpected fiscal hiccup such as pregnancy or loss of a job or something of that nature, which are very real situations. Home purchase involves not just the cost of a home but also mortgage insurance, legal fees, survey fees, brokerage fees, inspection fees, utility deposits, and many other costs that people often don't recognize when they get into purchasing a home, and that's not to speak of the very often substantial maintenance costs that come with home ownership.

One of our problems not just in Alberta but across the country in this whole age these days is that we don't have any affordable housing. We make housing unaffordable by building in all the bells and whistles with monster homes rather than giving a wider choice of starter homes of a more affordable size with just the basics. We build up expectations by marketing all of the fancy styles of housing in prestigious neighbourhoods with all the amenities. When I say we, Mr. Speaker, I mean all of society. We build up expectations. Home builders do, developers do, marketers do, realtors do, municipalities do: everybody builds up expectations of a nice, fancy home, which is the dream of everyone, but we can't always expect young people and people just starting out to get into a very expensive home right off the bat.

Mr. Speaker, my biggest concern is with what this bill potentially does, and that is that it creates a debt burden that people very often cannot afford. We've recently seen a global economic collapse that was triggered by mortgage lenders enticing possibly naive prospective homebuyers to get in over their heads. This is very dangerous territory, as we have seen. While well meaning, I would suggest that this bill has the potential of creating a further problem right here at home with young people getting into homes.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage people to defeat this bill.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today

to speak to Bill 208, the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act, put forward by the Member for Lethbridge-West. I commend my esteemed colleague from Lethbridge-West for his efforts to bring home ownership into the grasp of more Albertans, particularly that group of Albertans financially capable of paying the monthly cost of the mortgage but unable to meet the criteria set out by lending institutions.

We all know that the prosperity and population growth that our province has experienced in the past couple of years has caused housing prices to rise. Even with real estate prices leveling off recently, first-time buyers are still feeling the effects. An average single-family house in Edmonton sold for \$362,000 this September compared with \$216,000 in September of 2005. That's a 67 per cent increase in the span of three years. The Calgary real estate market has painted a similar picture. Today a single-family home in Calgary sells for an average of \$444,000, where three years ago it was \$283,000, a difference of 57 per cent. Similar rises in housing prices have been seen across the province, although 2008 has actually been kinder to home buyers than 2007, with average prices dropping at least 6 per cent this year over last.

The frustration and concern of prospective homebuyers is understandable, Mr. Speaker. We've probably all heard the stories. Those of us with young adult children have probably worried alongside them as they struggled to climb onto the property ladder while earning a modest income as they begin their careers and pay off student debt. The goal of home ownership really has become a dream for many who are still paying rent while scraping together a down payment. The Member for Lethbridge-West understands this struggle and has attempted to address it with the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act.

However, while I support the goal which Bill 208 strives for and while I, too, want to see more Albertans owning homes, I cannot support this bill. In many ways Bill 208 sets out to support high-risk borrowers, Mr. Speaker. These borrowers are the potential homeowners who have been unable to get lender approval. Financial institutions have long-standing protections in place for a reason. Simply put, that reason is to protect them from the monetary risk of a borrower defaulting.

Anyone who doubts the prudence of these protections needs only to glance southward at our nearest neighbour, where a housing crisis quickly became a financial crisis. It seems the only reprieve from the financial crisis coverage on cable news like CNN these days is when the cameras are turned towards the new president, but even then the U.S. economy remains a polarizing issue. Surely, we've all taken note and should now heed the warning: much of the crisis in the United States can be traced to subprime mortgages. Now, I acknowledge that the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act is not the same as subprime mortgages, Mr. Speaker. Still, the intent of this legislation is to give people who would normally be denied mortgages the opportunity to attain money for housing.

It's risky business, to say the least. What business do we as government have stepping into that role and taking on a risk with borrowers that most lenders are unwilling to lend to? Our role as government is not to dabble in these markets, nor should we be accepting unnecessary financial risk. Any bad risk where our government loses money means all Alberta taxpayers lose money, Mr. Speaker. I can empathize with the desire of many to own a home immediately, but our government is not in the habit of providing homes for those already housed.

Alberta should not be acting as a guarantor on high-risk loans, Mr. Speaker. We would be better served and Albertans would be better served by not tying up money by guaranteeing unnecessary risk. Instead, the best action we can take as government is to continue to

make Alberta stronger by investing those same resources in further diversifying the economy and promoting what strong and vibrant communities we have. By continuing to strengthen and diversify the economy, we are protecting the Albertans of tomorrow as well as those of today.

I see initiatives with these aims already coming into play in current government priorities. The government of Alberta is committed to increasing innovation and building a skilled workforce that will improve the long-run sustainability of our economy. This means taking steps that will help encourage Alberta businesses to improve their productivity and global competitiveness. This means introducing a 10 per cent tax credit to stimulate private-sector scientific research and experimental development in Alberta. This means strengthening and diversifying our agricultural sector. These are the keys to success, prosperity, and wealth for all Albertans.

While I commend the spirit of this proposed legislation, I must respectfully oppose it. In short, I cannot support the Alberta Affordable Mortgage Protection Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to close debate.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and close debate on Bill 208. I'd first like to thank all of the members of the House for taking the time and thought put into speaking to this very important bill and for showing that they truly do care about the people in our province that are a little less fortunate. To that end, we have a number of extremely good programs that are being delivered through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, programs that are to attempt to build over the next four or five years another 11,000 affordable units for Albertans, and I think that's a very applaudable and laudable goal.

I would like to clarify one point, though, that kept coming up over and over again. A number of speakers brought up the issue that we would be providing mortgages to people who do not meet any or all of the good lending criteria. Nothing could be farther from the truth, Mr. Speaker. This program is to support only people with income and good credit ratings who meet all of the criteria for a mortgage except for one, and that one criteria is that they have been unable to save a down payment. These may be some of the most stable and lowest risk Albertans that we have. These are the hard-working Albertans we have that for whatever reasons have just been unable to save a mortgage down payment, but for every other use they've been able to hold down a great job and amass a credit rating.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is involved in the affordable housing industry with a commitment to provide 11,000 units over the next five years. This represents a very noble goal, and the minister is well on her way to providing this very important housing. In these projects the province pays approximately 70 per cent of the cost of construction, with the developer covering 30 per cent of the cost. In return for the 70 per cent investment the province receives a 20-year rental agreement. On a project with a hundred units at \$100,000 per unit, which would be very inexpensive in today's market, there is a \$10 million investment to build these 100 units. The province invests \$7 million of this cost.

Under Bill 208 the same \$10 million project would require a \$1 million guarantee, with the homeowners covering the cost of the project through mortgages. The maximum cost to the province on this project would be \$1 million, and this is only if everyone defaults, which is a very unlikely outcome. This is a \$6 million savings to the province on 100 units, or \$60 million in savings if we were to build 1,000 units of affordable housing, which could be sold

to people in this condition. This is the true intention of Bill 208: significant cost savings to the province and the potential to provide more low-cost housing as well as allowing more people to get into the market.

Mr. Speaker, in the present climate of financial uncertainty I don't blame any of the members of this House for being uncomfortable supporting this bill; however, I believe this bill represents the lowest cost option for the province to provide low-cost housing and future opportunity. The bill represents hope for a housing industry being battered by falling demand, falling prices, and rising inventory; hope for the 110,000 people working in the Alberta home building industry; and hope for Alberta families, Alberta's young couples, and, indeed, our seniors. This bill represents hope for our neighbours, our friends, and our families.

Thank you.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

3:50

Bill 209
Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and
Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences)
Amendment Act, 2008

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today in this Assembly as the sponsor for Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by recognizing the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, who brought this bill forward in 2006. This was an incredibly important topic then. It has become increasingly important over the last two years, and I'm happy to bring it forward again.

The purpose of Bill 209 is to increase safety on Alberta's highways at minimal cost to taxpayers by preventing drivers who are involved in the drug trade from operating motor vehicles. This bill is not intended as a solution to all drug trafficking in the province. What it provides is a tool that peace officers can utilize for drug trafficking incidents. It's a tool that may also make drug trafficking less attractive to those who are involved in this illegal activity.

Two sanctions are provided by Bill 209. The first is disqualification from driving a motor vehicle for a period of one year upon a finding of guilt under section 5 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The second is the immediate seizure or immobilization and eventual sale of a vehicle used in this type of offence. It would amend the Traffic Safety Act to allow the province to disqualify individuals convicted of drug trafficking or possession with the intent to traffic when operating a vehicle from holding a driver's licence for a period of one year from the date of conviction.

If an individual chooses to use their vehicle to transport and distribute illegal drugs, that individual is no longer considering the impact of their actions on other persons sharing the road. It's a clear indication that an individual is choosing to ignore the consequences of their behaviour and is disregarding the dangers associated with their activities.

Disqualifying people from operating a motor vehicle as a result of drug trafficking will not only create a deterrent for this behaviour; it will also make it harder for those who continue to traffic. Without a licence the consequences of being caught are substantially higher. However, disqualification only removes the capacity to legally operate a motor vehicle whereas confiscation of the vehicle prevents it from being operated at all. The vehicle of a driver who is charged

under section 5 of the Controlled Drugs and Substance Act with trafficking in substances or possession for the purpose of trafficking will then be impounded. It will be up to the owner to prove that the vehicle used was not purchased with money obtained from drug trafficking.

In cases where it's determined the vehicle was indeed purchased from profits related to illegal activity, the vehicle will become the property of the province and then sold. The money from the sale will be put towards restitution for victims of crime. Where it is proved that the vehicle was purchased through legal means, it will be returned to the owner. In situations where the person charged pleads down his conviction, the impound fees will remain the responsibility of the person charged.

Mr. Speaker, the aim of this bill is to ensure that those who are using their vehicles for drug trafficking will not be able to continue the illegal behaviour. Getting them off the streets and removing their ability to continue to transport and sell illegal drugs will immediately lessen the danger on Alberta's roads. Bill 209 also works toward keeping those individuals from continuing the activity after being found guilty. People who transport illegal drugs are typically far from being at the top of any organized criminal activity. They're often hired by those making large sums of money to deliver their product.

This bill does not presume to solve the problem of drug trafficking throughout the province, but what it will do is provide a deterrent for those who are looking to make a few dollars by supplementing their income through trafficking drugs. In some cases it'll be young people who see this activity as a way of making money while going to school or who may have dropped out of school to make easy money. It may also be seen as a means of supplementing family income. No matter what the scenario or reason for drug trafficking it is an illegal activity that reduces the safety of Albertans.

Bill 209 will let drug traffickers know that no matter how big or small they might be in the scope of trafficking activity in this province, compromising traffic safety will not be tolerated, and the instrument used to commit the crime will become the property of the province. That's why fees for seizure and storage of the vehicle would become the responsibility of the offender even in cases where the charges are pleaded down. Again, the only instance where fees would become the responsibility of the Alberta government is when the suspect is acquitted. If the owner of the vehicle was not involved in the offence, he or she could appeal the seizure to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board.

Mr. Speaker, the safety of Albertan motorists as well as pedestrians is compromised by those who use their vehicles to transport illegal drugs. Whether it's high-speed pursuits, gunfire, or even police takedowns on our neighbourhood streets, the safety of Albertans is compromised by drug trafficking. The intention of Bill 209 is to improve safety on our streets and work toward keeping people involved in drug trafficking from endangering our communities.

This bill has been a long time in the making and has been to this House before but has unfortunately fallen off the Order Paper. It's an issue that needs a solution. On November 6 of this year Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, was introduced and aims to accomplish the goals set out under Bill 209. The legislation required to accomplish the goals of Bill 209 is very serious and complicated in nature, especially in terms of how to deal with property acquired through criminal activity.

The Ministry of Justice has been very helpful throughout the researching of this bill, and I want to thank the minister and her staff for looking at the achievables of this bill in such a positive way. I

agree that the intent of this bill would be well served under the other act. I look forward to hearing what the rest of my colleagues have to say about Bill 209.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to participate in this discussion on Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. As past chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I can truly appreciate the gravity of this issue, and I'd like to applaud the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing this bill forward.

Drug trafficking poses serious safety risks in a myriad of ways, Mr. Speaker. First, notwithstanding the horrifying potential of illicit drugs and the obvious facilitation of their usage that trafficking promotes, the activity itself presents a danger on the roads of our province. Drug dealers often do extensive driving in order to transport their product and reach their customers. Drug trafficking is associated with higher accident rates as well as higher rates of noncompliance with the law, and that affects all sorts of innocent people.

Second, drug trafficking is a malpractice, visibly so, on the roads as evidenced by what in many cases has been seized by police during routine traffic stops. Allowing any individual to operate a vehicle on our roads for the purpose of drug trafficking is in all respects contrary to public safety. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, law enforcement officers need effective tools against drug traffickers above and beyond the simple power to lay charges. Bill 209 is one such tool that is well worth considering.

Bill 209 proposes that officers have the power to seize the vehicle or suspend the licence of an individual upon the laying of a charge. When officers stop the vehicle, it's crucial that they're able to determine whether there's a probable cause to arrest an individual and, if necessary, search the vehicle for further evidence. Thanks to their specialized training all of our province's officers are equipped to determine said probable cause.

Mr. Speaker, a number of signs, or indicia, are used in determining whether or not an individual is likely to be a drug trafficker as opposed to simply being a drug user. I'll focus primarily on the indicia used to discern possession for the purpose of trafficking as opposed to the charge of trafficking in a controlled substance, which is more cut and dried and not as common, to be witnessed on the road by an officer.

Typically an officer uses a combination of different indicia to determine if there is intent to traffic as opposed to simple possession. Initially an officer may note the behaviour and demeanour of a suspect as well as the presence of any known gang tattoos, patches, rings, or the like. An officer can also utilize the individual's identity, once obtained, to determine if they have any prior criminal convictions related to drug offences.

4:00

Now, in concert with details of the individual's identity the officer can also use information on the vehicle's registration to determine if indeed it is registered to the individual. Since drug trafficking operations can be large in scope and can utilize a fleet of vehicles not necessarily registered to the runners who operate them, obviously, a mismatch between the driver and the vehicle's registrant can be used in part to justify an arrest.

In addition to extensive driving, Mr. Speaker, drug trafficking

requires a great degree of communication, which is typically carried out via cellular phone. In some cases a drug dealer will carry multiple communications devices and telephones, and the presence of more than one cellular telephone may or may not be an indication that a driver fitting the previously mentioned indicia is concealing drugs for the purpose of trafficking.

It's also worth noting that it is within an officer's rights to answer the telephone if it rings while they're present at a traffic stop and they suspect a drug offence. I'm sure that's not a well-known fact. If the telephone is indeed used for trafficking, it would be likely easy for the officer to determine that the call was made to arrange a transaction. Buyers and sellers often use a system of jargon for the type of drug as well as the quantity that under scrutiny can serve as yet another piece of indicia.

The officer may also spot large amounts of cash, sometimes folded in a unique way for trafficking purposes. Materials used for separating quantities, such as plastic Baggies or a small pocket weigh scale, or, of course, a number of separate quantities of the drug itself also indicate possible trafficking. These indicia represent a key fact of drug trafficking, that they need to separate quantities and the need to carry a number of separate quantities.

Dealers may also conceal their drugs in a plastic candy container – spitballs of cocaine, for instance – to keep it out of sight. They can also utilize what is referred to as a swallow bottle, a nonacidic beverage. While none of these containers would be suspicious in their own regard necessarily, dealers make use of them to be able to swallow their drugs in the event of an encounter with the police. Typically an individual would not carry a container of multiple quantities on themselves for personal use. Therefore, if an officer were to pull over a vehicle and while approaching it sees the driver open a plastic candy container and drink half a bottle of water, that serves obviously as another indicia of drug trafficking.

Finally, weapons such as knives, firearms, bear spray are also common to find in drug trafficking vehicles. Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the primary indicia used by well-trained officers to establish probable cause.

Even in the absence of clearer cut trafficking signals – multiple cellular phones, gang insignia, or a prior record of trafficking – a sufficient quantity of drugs would be presumed to be intended for trafficking. Officers know that with hard drugs an individual user would not buy more than they go through in a run. This provides a good idea of appropriate amounts for immediate personal use.

Clearly, officers are able to discern between a regular nondrug offence related to a moving violation, a driver in possession of drugs, and a driver in possession of drugs for the purpose of trafficking. With the range of indicia at their disposal officers can effectively establish probable cause and thereafter lay charges. Similarly, officers would be able to effectively utilize the powers sought by Bill 209, which would immobilize and/or disqualify those charged with drug trafficking before their court appearances and convictions. In addition to laying charges, officers can halt drug trafficking to a certain degree while charges are processed. If officers are able to use the new measures suggested in Bill 209, our streets and our communities will be safer.

These are just a few reasons why I stand today in full support of the hon. Member for Strathcona and his very, very worthwhile and commendable Bill 209. I do encourage all of our hon. colleagues to join with me and him in voting for it without any hesitation whatsoever.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that I'm opposite the Member for Calgary-Lougheed a few times today. I'm not sure what our day is about. All kidding aside, I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. The purpose of this bill is to increase safety on Alberta's highways by preventing drivers involved in the drug trade from operating motor vehicles. Bill 209 intends to help remove drug traffickers from Alberta's roads because they are more likely to commit traffic violations and cause accidents.

People arrested for all types of drug offences were shown to have a significantly higher rate of traffic violations, to be involved in significantly more traffic accidents, including a disproportionately large amount of single-vehicle car accidents, more injury and fatality accidents, and have a significantly greater culpability in accidents. People who sell drugs to support their own habits are more likely to drive while high than any other drug user and the general population. This legislation acknowledges and deals with the fact that people involved in the drug trade are in fact associated with significantly higher risks of involvement in traffic accidents. Drug traffickers are a threat to others on Alberta's highways. An objective of this piece of legislation is to help reduce this threat and protect the public at large.

Mr. Speaker, the business of trafficking involves distracting activities such as the use of cellphones, driving at night, the frequent presence on the road. Driver distraction occurs when the driver's focus is on something other than the primary task of driving. This obviously increases the risk of driver error and collision involvement, drivers who talk on cellphones while driving, of course, being four times more likely to be involved in such a collision. Drug traffickers frequently drive at night, and this poses a safety threat to Albertans. Drug traffickers do not have the safety tools or policies in place to ensure the safety of others while driving at night and likely not the impetus either. Taxi companies, city workers, garbage trucks, and other companies have standards and mechanisms in place to ensure the safety of all Albertans and their employees who are working at night, but obviously this isn't the case for the drug trade.

Dealers may also do some preparatory work such as bagging pills or wrapping marijuana, distracting them even further while driving to their next destination. Mr. Speaker, drug users are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including speeding up to get through traffic lights, driving while tired, or driving over the speed limit, as I mentioned. It's without question that there are many issues and fatalities on the roads that are already an issue. Having regard to my previous comments, this is something that we should consider.

The B.C. traffic collision statistics state that the frequency of human condition or action factors in injury or fatality collisions in 2005 were, first of all, that driver internal or external distractions caused 609 injuries and 10 fatalities. Extreme fatigue caused 241 injuries and eight fatalities. Ability was impaired by drugs, causing 101 injuries and seven fatalities. Suspected drug involvement caused 226 injuries, 13 fatalities; ignoring a traffic control device, 1,466 injuries and 20 fatalities. Exceeding the speed limit, which admittedly I'm guilty of on occasion, caused 1,357 injuries and 92 fatalities. Driving in excess of the speed appropriate for road conditions caused 190 injuries and 21 fatalities. Obviously, we need to reduce some collisions, Mr. Speaker.

My father, being in insurance, would be quite happy with me reading these off.

The Alberta traffic collision statistics in 2006 state that the number of drivers involved in fatal driving collisions due to fatigue or sleep at the wheel were seven, the number of drivers involved in nonfatal injuries due to fatigue or sleep conditions were 305, the

number of drivers involved in casualty collisions due to fatigue or sleep were 312, and impairment by drugs caused two fatalities, 49 nonfatal injury collisions, and 51 casualty collisions.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that anyone here is the king of the road, but the king, obviously, has to be safe. These are pretty grim statistics.

Drug trafficking obviously involves dangerous and illegal activities. Violence associated and connected with drug trafficking is an issue as well.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 209 promotes safer highways and communities. This bill intends to help eliminate the business of drug trafficking from Alberta's highways. The government of Alberta should in fact do everything possible to keep our communities safe by reducing the risks that are associated with drug trafficking.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, Bill 209 addresses the government of Alberta's priority to provide safe and secure communities for all Albertans. This bill clearly and accurately identifies the safety hazards and risks that are associated with drug trafficking, a priority that we must have. Amending the Traffic Safety Act is not the only option for attaining safer communities. This being said, of course, there is Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, which intends to achieve similar goals to this Bill 209. Bill 50 was obviously introduced into this Assembly on November 6.

This being said, I urge all hon. members to support this bill and ensure that the king of this whole equation is safety for our communities. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly and contribute to debate on Bill 209. A little over a year ago our Premier gave me the honour of chairing the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. It was really an interesting experience. I had the opportunity to travel the province to meet with some of our foremost experts, work with our dedicated police forces, talk to people everywhere about the impact of crime on their communities. It was also a very difficult experience. I saw the damage that crime does to communities.

Drugs are a big problem in Alberta. They addict our youth. They promote crime. They compromise the safety of Albertans, whether they're young or whether they're old. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the Member for Strathcona for bringing this legislation forward. I believe that it will improve safety for all Albertans. Drugs are insidious because they take away from our safety in so many ways. Kids get high on meth and break into homes. Partygoers take ecstasy and start fights at a club. Organized crime sets up a drug lab and fills a house with enough chemicals to level the Legislature Annex.

It's a tough problem to tackle, Mr. Speaker. The bad guys have lots of resources, and they sometimes are one step ahead of us. We need to get creative. We need to take back our communities. Bill 209 is a step in the right direction. It's going to prevent those who have been convicted under section 5 of the Controlled Drug and Substances Act from compromising safety on our roads.

Roads are an important part of our life in our province. We drive to get groceries. We take our kids to school. We go to work. I drive the QE II every week. Now, Mr. Speaker, how many cars have I passed that were driven by someone carrying out a drug business and endangering others? Roads are a big part of our communities, and Bill 209 will help us take back our roads. Having unsafe drivers

on the road is a danger to everyone, and those who use an automobile to deliver drugs are doing something that is very unsafe.

We know that drugs impair our functions much like alcohol does. We also know that the criminal mindset is inherently antisocial and reckless. It seeks to put personal gain ahead of the well-being of others. We see beatings. We see drive-by shootings and all sorts of violence associated with the drug trade. If these people are going to engage in this type of violent activity and they're going to continue to traffic despite all the evidence of how harmful drugs can be, then they're probably not going to care about others on the road either.

I read a story in the newspaper the other day about a dial-a-doper in a small town in Alberta. Two men with connections to organized crime were running a dial-a-doper service out of a hotel. People would just phone them up, and they would deliver cocaine and marijuana right to the door, probably quicker than our pizza delivery, Mr. Speaker. I read in the *Calgary Herald* that police just busted a guy selling cocaine out of his F-150. I wouldn't want my children crossing the street with these guys driving around. It's time we get them off the roadway so they can't endanger law-abiding Albertans.

I saw a lot of pretty unsettling things in my travels around this province. One thing that never ceases to amaze me, though, is people's ignorance to the danger of drugs. Sometimes I hear people say: "This doesn't affect me. I live in a nice neighbourhood in a province with a great economy, and there are no drugs where I live." That simply isn't true, Mr. Speaker. Drugs affect everyone.

I use my own constituency as an example. Calgary-Fish Creek is an upper-middle-class area. It has an average income well above the provincial norm. Levels of education are high, over two-thirds of my constituency have postsecondary qualifications, and nearly 10 per cent of them are bilingual. Calgary-Fish Creek really is the ideal place to live, work, and raise a family. Still, there are drugs in my constituency. I've spoken with constituents who call about drug deals going on in their own neighbourhoods. I've seen houses that have shown signs of drug activity. They're houses where, when you knock on the door and discover they're just a tangle of cords, lights, and watering system, someone is clearly cultivating something. Sometimes from the outside you can even see areas where the mould is growing. I've personally seen these houses in my constituency, and I know that we have drug labs in our beautiful city also.

In those houses that seem to have nobody living in them, there is not a scratch of food in the place, but there is enough pseudoephedrine to permanently eliminate the common cold. Somebody is cooking something. We know that they're not making the product for nothing, and they're not making it here just to export it to some distant jurisdiction. These drugs are being made to sell to people in our communities, and we've got to realize that this does compromise our safety. Knowing that drugs are being made and consumed in my constituency makes me wonder what that guy who cut me off has been doing. I seriously doubt that all drug users lock themselves in a bubble where they can't hurt anyone. They go into our communities and onto our roads, and they endanger Albertans.

I know that this bill isn't going to solve all the problems associated with drugs. I'm glad that our government has taken other steps to deal with the problem. We've allocated funding to law enforcement and established the Safe Communities Secretariat. We've given the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods legislation to our law enforcement as a tool to improve safety in our communities. Bill 209 would build on the progress that we've already made. It would be a positive development for community safety and an innovative tool in the hands of the good guys, our dedicated law enforcement people. I want to urge my colleagues to consider supporting Bill 209.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the Member for Strathcona. Bill 209 would amend the Traffic Safety Act to give the province the authority to suspend the licences of those individuals convicted of drug trafficking or possession with intent to traffic when operating a vehicle for a period of one year from date of conviction. I commend the hon. member for bringing forward legislation that helps to make Alberta's roads safer, particularly from criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, drugs are what saps the life and the soul of already troubled Albertans. Many of those people who resort to drugs are already in a difficult situation or place in their life. When they resort to drugs, drugs cause many problems within families: health-related problems, addictions. I personally have seen first-hand many Albertans and young Albertans, especially our teenagers, overdose from drugs and take their lives. These substances rip families apart and rip the fabric of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, protecting Albertans and ensuring safety and security whether it's on our roads, our highways, or anywhere in our communities is one of our most important responsibilities as government, yet when it comes to legislation, we also need to be practical and ensure that we're not incurring unnecessary costs, creating duplication, or being inefficient. One of the benefits of what is proposed in Bill 209 is that it is able to achieve this delicate balance as the costs of implementation are minimal in terms of both resources and administration. This is largely because there are existing mechanisms under the Traffic Safety Act that already allow for the disqualification, seizure, or immobilization of a vehicle. In this way, Bill 209 is simply an extension of the current underlying philosophy of this section of the Traffic Safety Act. The act also maintains that any associated fees incurred by the seizure, storage, and possible sale of a vehicle are the responsibility of the offender.

Most importantly, Bill 209 affords another level of protection to Albertans against criminal activity by using the current tools of the Traffic Safety Act. Mr. Speaker, these tools have proven both their necessity and effectiveness. In fact, an average of more than 4,000 vehicles are seized each year in this province. There are a number of reasons that this may occur, such as when a driver fails to follow the rules of the road or is driving carelessly as defined in the Traffic Safety Act. Under the act peace officers are also permitted to suspend a driver's licence for 24 hours when they suspect the driver of an alcohol- or drug-related driving offence. Although drug- and alcohol-related offences became a matter of federal authority under the Criminal Code, an area of federal authority, Alberta's law enforcement has the ability to ensure safety of provincial roadways in these cases through vehicle seizure. While a conviction may be sufficient, it is neither necessary nor required for Alberta law enforcement to act in these cases.

4:20

In addition, under the Alberta administrative licence suspension program peace officers can suspend a driver's licence for a three- or six-month period for alcohol-related offences. In order for a driver to have their licence reinstated before the suspension date is up, he or she must bring an appeal to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. Under the board's vehicle seizure program there is a set procedure for appeals. The grounds for appeal are also clearly outlined in the Traffic Safety Act under section 40, Mr. Speaker. Acceptable grounds for appeal include cases where the vehicle is

driven without the owner's consent or if the owner did not or could not reasonably have known that the driver had a suspended licence.

Service Alberta's motor vehicle system already manages various types of driver suspension for the vehicle seizure program. This means that with minor modifications it can support the new type of suspension proposed in Bill 209. In fact, the Alberta vehicle seizure program was first introduced in 1991 and has clearly been able to adapt to and include new protections as required within both legislation and administration processes. In short, existing mechanisms within Alberta legislation are flexible enough to allow us to integrate new and emerging requirements such as proposed within Bill 209.

The most obvious benefit of all is that we do not have to wait until criminal matters are decided through federal legal processes before we are able to take action to ensure public safety at the provincial level. In this way, I believe that the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, could be implemented at minimal cost to government and, therefore, to the taxpayers. Any amendment to the Traffic Safety Act approved through this bill would presumably be enforced in the same manner as other violations under the act.

Mr. Speaker, not only is this a practical bill; it's the right bill. It's the right thing to do for Albertans. It's a main part of the strategy to help reduce drugs in Alberta. Given this, I'm in support of Bill 209 and encourage my colleagues in this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 209 follows along the lines of Bill 49 in the sense that Bill 49 dealt with driving under the influence of drugs. In both Bill 49 and proposed Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, it's absolutely essential that the evidence be admissible.

I pointed out that one of the shortcomings of Bill 49 had to do with how the evidence was collected and who did the collecting. The Premier has spoken quite dramatically and quite potentially harshly against what he viewed as the catch-and-release program that judges have undertaken. Judges have responded that it's up to the Legislature to make legislation that's enforceable, that clearly spells out the penalties associated with a particular offence, leaving judges the room to decide on the length of the punishment for the offence, the length of imprisonment and so on.

So my only concern with regard to Bill 209 is that the evidence be admissible, that the arrest be made in such a way that the individual can't say: "Well, this was an illegal investigation. I was pulled over, and the individual had no reason to suspect that I had drugs in my trunk." Therefore, the case gets thrown out. I know that Albertans quite often get caught up with CSI programs and so on. Our Canadian laws and our Alberta laws are considerably different from those of the States. Regardless, the admissible evidence is what sees a case being thrown out or a potential drug offender being released because the evidence wasn't obtained in an admissible manner.

This Bill 209, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008 – it would be a good test of a person under the influence of drugs to see if they could accurately state that bill title without fumbling. Anyway, it also follows up on Bill 39, that was proposed two years ago by the hon. Richard Magnus, who at that time was the MLA for Calgary-North Hill. Under Bill 39, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005, vehicles could be seized if they were used by johns seeking prostitution opportunities.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would like to see similar legislation introduced that would involve the seizure of vehicles if they had within them unlicensed firearms and, in particular, handguns. This is a form of legislation that police departments provincially, RCMP, and particularly the Calgary municipal police force have pushed. So I would hope that in supporting Bill 209 this is one of a series of trying to get illicit activities off the road and turning the ill-gotten gains – the money that was seized for drug activities, the vehicles that were seized in terms of promoting activities – into opportunities for individuals. I would like to see a portion, for example, of the money collected when the vehicles are sold go to programs such as AADAC, although I'm not sure where AADAC has gone with the loss of that particular organization under the centralization of the health boards.

This is a good bill. I appreciate its intent. It follows up, again, on a bill that the hon. Member for Red Deer-South brought forward with regard to crystal meth, I believe, and it also indicates that the properties, not only the vehicles but the properties, that were involved in drug manufacturing and so on be seized. This is a very positive attempt by the government and by the promoter of this bill to recognize the damage that is done by drug dealers. It recognizes down the line the addiction and the misfortune that is brought upon individuals and families who become addicted to drugs. As a result, I will recommend to my caucus colleagues that they support Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to get to say a few words about Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, if for no other reason than just to get to say that name. I really want to congratulate my colleague from Strathcona for bringing this forward, for his initiative in creating an opportunity for us to have this discussion about a very important issue.

Now, obviously, this act is primarily a Traffic Safety Act, and a number of my colleagues already have spoken about the benefits of this bill in terms of traffic safety. All of those comments bear repeating, and I probably will be repeating some of them. I also want to speak a little bit more about the philosophy of fighting crime because that certainly is a big element of this act. Obviously, we don't have Criminal Code jurisdiction in Alberta as a province, but we want to do our part in fighting crime. I'm sure that my colleagues would agree that a day doesn't go by that we don't see news of some sort of drug-related crime on the front pages, on the news. This is a problem which seems to be becoming pervasive. Obviously, it's something that we can't ignore, and I don't think Albertans want us to ignore it.

4:30

Our law enforcement authorities are straining to keep a lid on the drug trade and all of the negative impacts of the drug trade in our province. The drug trade has become a major global business. It's very sophisticated. It's very far reaching. It's now reaching us in our own neighbourhoods, right where we live, and it's coming there in vehicles, by and large. There's the linkage, and that's the reason why we need to take steps in our own provincial legislation to do what we can to combat it.

Now, as has already been said, no one tactic will do the job here. We are very fortunate in Alberta, thanks to the leadership of my

colleague behind me and her committee, to have a safe communities task force at work in the province and a safe communities initiative. One of the brilliant pieces of that initiative is that it's not a one-dimensional approach. It involves nine different government departments all working together. It's a full-court press, and all tools that are available have to be used. I'm very supportive of initiatives that deal with prevention and deal with attacking crime at its roots, but we also have to take steps on the other end of the spectrum, which is that the people who are out there committing the crimes in the neighbourhoods have to be dealt with in a very firm way. Again, I think Albertans want us to give that message.

In my conversations with police and Crown prosecutors in my constituency one of the things that they repeatedly tell me is that we have to take the profitability out of these drug ventures. That means that it's logical that we would be attacking the tools of those crimes. We have to create a disincentive for people to engage in this activity. That's something that I think Bill 209 does brilliantly. The tools of our local dealers are basically, as has already been indicated, their cellphones, their cars, and their driver's licences. We need to take those away from them and put them out of business.

Detractors may say that if you start taking away cars, the people who are in this business are just going to make sure that they're not driving their own car when they get caught. Well, you know, there are other ways that we can adjust to deal with such situations. I think another good thing about this legislation is that it sends a clear message to people that they're responsible for their vehicles, and they had better not be used in criminal activity. There is a way of them getting their cars back if that happens, but they're going to have to satisfy somebody that they didn't have any knowledge of it. I think that the message is that everybody has a responsibility in fighting crime.

Once again, I want to thank my colleague from Strathcona for bringing this forward. I fully endorse the intent and the focus of this bill, and I believe that its passage will be welcomed by the people of Alberta. I also look forward to the continued debate on this matter.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise in the House and speak to Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. That is quite a title. This proposed legislation intends to make our streets safer by seizing vehicles used for drug trafficking and disqualifying individuals convicted of drug trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, keeping our roadways and our communities safe is a priority for this government. I applaud the hon. Member for Strathcona for his initiative on this. This bill would provide our police and peace officers with an additional tool as they continue to work diligently to make our communities safe. Under Bill 209 those charged with drug trafficking or possession with the intent to traffic under section 5 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act could have their vehicles seized. If the charges later lead to a conviction, their licence could be revoked for a period of one year. This is significant because it removes offenders and their vehicles from our roadways when they are initially charged with the crime of drug trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 209 will deter or influence the decision of those who use their vehicles for the purpose of drug trafficking; however, while such repercussions will influence their behaviour and the behaviour of future drug traffickers, this is not the primary intent of

this bill. The intent of Bill 209 is to improve the safety of all Alberta communities by removing individuals from our roadways who are involved in unsafe and illegal activities.

I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the following traffic collision statistics for Alberta in 2005: vehicle collisions totalled 124,206, the number of people killed from these collisions totalled 466, and the total number of casualties came to approximately 24,970. As vehicle-related deaths rank as the second most common cause of death and the second most common cause of injury in Alberta, we need to find innovative ways to improve roadway safety. These accidents are a significant strain on our public health care system and affect, of course, countless families and communities.

Mr. Speaker, we need only to look at the number of drug trafficking charges laid in Alberta to recognize the significant impact these activities have on our communities. In 2005 over 3,000 drug trafficking related incidents were reported in Alberta. Of those 3,000 the two most common drugs to be trafficked were cannabis and cocaine. Cocaine trafficking incidence was almost 80 per cent higher than that of cannabis. There were a total of 1,685 cocaine-related drug trafficking incidents in Alberta in 2005. Of that amount, roughly 1,400 led to formal charges. In comparison, cannabis trafficking totalled 973 incidents resulting in 597 charges.

Many drug traffickers support their own drug habit by dealing in and selling drugs. We can make the fair assumption that many of these individuals take to the roadways under the influence of the drugs they intend to sell. Mr. Speaker, I doubt that there are many in this Assembly that would disagree with me when I say that these individuals who are high on our roads pose a great risk to our roadway safety. Bill 209 proposes to take away the offenders' driving privileges by having their vehicles seized and their licences suspended. By seizing the vehicles used by those charged with drug trafficking and suspending the licences of those convicted, we will be protecting innocent and law-abiding Albertans from potential injury and even death.

I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to a 1994 study by the California Department of Motor Vehicles. In this study they examined the records of 106,000 felony and misdemeanour drug arrests to see if any correlation existed with traffic violations. In this case felons included anyone who had been convicted of the distribution or sale of an illegal substance, transporting illegal substances, and possession or sale of controlled substances. It was shown that individuals arrested for drug offences committed substantially more traffic violations, were involved in significantly more traffic accidents, and a greater portion of these accidents resulted in injuries and fatalities. The author of the report concluded that "individuals arrested for drug violations represent an elevated traffic safety risk, and that there is a nexus between drugs and traffic safety." Bill 209 would ensure that many of these high-risk individuals are taken off of our roadways.

Mr. Speaker, we only have to watch the nightly news to know how crime is affecting many Albertans and communities across this great province. This bill will give our peace and police officers additional means to keep our roadways and communities safe for our friends and for our families, and it is in line with the government's priority of creating strong communities across Alberta; therefore, I fully support Bill 209. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you.

4:40

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour

and privilege to speak to Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. It is quite a mouthful.

I commend my colleague the hon. Member for Strathcona for introducing this bill. Mr. Speaker, this legislation is designed to give our law enforcement agencies another tool to assist them in combatting one of our major law enforcement problems of the day. If passed, this act would permit law officers to seize the vehicle of a driver who is charged with trafficking illegal drugs or with possession of drugs for the purpose of trafficking as stated in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Those convicted may have their driver's licence suspended for a period of one year.

I would like to discuss what measures are currently available to law enforcement and how the measures proposed in Bill 209 could be useful in ensuring that our communities are safe. Drivers may have their licences suspended for several reasons, including being found guilty of violating any provision of the Criminal Code concerning driving, such as sections 253 and 254 in regard to driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Drivers may also have their licence suspended if they fail to follow the rules of the road as defined in the Traffic Safety Act. Section 89 of the Traffic Safety Act permits peace officers to suspend a driver's licence for 24 hours in case of a suspected alcohol-related Criminal Code driving offence.

Alcohol- and drug-impaired driving provisions of the Criminal Code were strengthened in February 2008 with the passage of Bill C-2 of the federal Parliament. Bill C-2 expands the drug enforcement capabilities of police officers by giving them the authority to demand physical sobriety tests and samples of bodily fluid for investigations. Officers are first authorized to conduct a standardized field sobriety test. If the officer suspects illegal drug use, they are permitted to escort the driver to a police station to administer a drug recognition expert evaluation, which uses a combination of interviews and physical observations. Should a specific family of drugs be identified, officers are permitted to take a saliva, blood, or urine sample. These samples may be used as evidence in drug-impaired driving prosecutions.

Numerous federal and provincial programs have been implemented to oversee the suspension and seizure of vehicles of drivers found in violation of the Criminal Code. One such program, the pipeline/convoy program, was implemented by the RCMP in 1995. Its purpose is to detect and seize illegal drugs in both personal and commercial vehicles. Inspired by a similar program implemented by the American Drug Enforcement Administration, the pipeline aspect of the program focuses on private motor vehicles while the convoy aspect deals with commercial vehicles. Training for this program includes instructing officers on how to intercept drug flows at traffic stops and decipher indicators such as anxiety or the odour of fresh or burned marijuana.

This program and the training it provides officers has proven to be highly successful in detecting and confiscating illegal drugs. For example, on September 13, 2006, Stony Plain-Spruce Grove RCMP initiated a traffic stop for two moving violations that yielded 8.6 kilograms of marijuana worth \$130,000, two kilograms of cocaine worth \$213,000, and \$10,000 in cash.

The Alberta administrative licence suspension program empowers a peace officer to issue a driver's licence suspension for three to six months for drivers charged with an alcohol-related offence without the need for conviction. Bill 209 goes further to ensure the safety of Albertans by suspending drivers involved in drug trafficking for one year. In addition, the Alberta vehicle seizure program was implemented in 1991 and permits the seizure of vehicles of drivers whose licences are suspended as outlined in section 173(1) of the Traffic

Safety Act. Those drivers charged under sections 253 and 254 of the Criminal Code may have their vehicles seized or immobilized for up to 24 hours.

[The Speaker in the chair]

However, while licence suspension has proven effective in reducing crashes among high-risk drivers, disqualification only removes the capacity to legally operate a vehicle. Bill 209 would address this problem by seizing and selling the vehicle of a convicted trafficker in addition to enforcing a licence suspension of one year. Drug traffickers pose a greater risk while driving a motor vehicle than law-abiding citizens for numerous reasons.

Moreover, drug traffickers commit significantly more traffic violations resulting in accidents, injuries, and fatalities. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is important that law enforcement officers possess the necessary authority to remove traffickers from our roads. Currently a suspended driver who is caught driving without his or her licence faces a fine of up to \$2,000 and a further six-month suspension. With Bill 209 police officers will have the authority at their discretion to seize a vehicle used at the time of an alleged offence. Police discretion to seize vehicles and sell them upon conviction is not without precedent as it is permitted under the Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will help this government achieve its priority of ensuring that Alberta communities are safe and secure by providing a useful tool for law enforcement to keep drug traffickers off our streets. Bill 209 will help ensure that fewer drug traffickers possess the means to drive. It will also decrease trafficking by increasing a licence suspension to a period of one year. The financial incentive of losing one's vehicle in addition to being disqualified from driving for up to a year could provide a compelling incentive for traffickers to discontinue their operations in Alberta and seek legitimate employment. Bill 209 would be an effective additional tool for our police officers to combat the growing threat of drug trafficking, in my opinion one of the major societal problems in recent years.

However, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important that this Assembly also consider Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, which was introduced to this Assembly on November 6. Bill 50 addresses the concerns related to drug trafficking that my hon. colleague from Strathcona has rightly brought forward. It imposes similar sanctions on drug traffickers upon a charge and conviction.

I encourage my hon. colleagues to join me in constructive debate on this bill and how to move forward in addressing drug trafficking in Alberta. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona. The proposed legislation would grant peace officers the discretion to seize and impound the vehicles of drivers who are charged with drug trafficking as well as give the province the authority to disqualify the individual's driver's licence for one year from the time of conviction.

As you know, this government has committed through its five key priorities to promote strong and vibrant communities and to reduce crime so that all Albertans feel safe. Bill 209 clearly addresses this

goal by proposing to target individuals who engage in activities that threaten the safety of all Albertans.

Put simply, the trafficking business promotes activities that are dangerous to safe driving practices. Drug traffickers stop illegally on public roads and are often distracted on cellphones in an attempt to drum up further sales. Even more disturbing, many drug traffickers are also drug users, resulting in more intoxicated drivers on our public streets. In fact, several studies have shown a direct correlation between drug offences and the sharp increase in traffic violations and accidents. Drug traffickers pose a significant risk to all Albertans' road safety. The strength of Bill 209 is that it recognizes and clearly addresses this risk. While I applaud the community safety measures proposed by Bill 209, the component that I find most enlightening is the decision to give vehicle seizure discretion to enforcement officers.

4:50

The licence suspension as well as the vehicle seizures are all tools that are intended to be used at the discretion of peace officers. Police discretion is not a new concept in law enforcement. In fact, the ability to use personal judgment is a cornerstone of police officers' skill set. Within the course of a day a police officer will be called upon several times to make judgment calls. Police officers are continually faced with using discretion and judgment. Police officers are entrusted with our protection and safety, and I applaud Bill 209 for recognizing this trust and granting officers further tools for ensuring the safety of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that Bill 209 is not authorizing police officers to impose punishment on suspected drug traffickers. Bill 209 clearly allows suspected drug traffickers to defend themselves in a court of law. Furthermore, if found not guilty, their seized vehicles would then be returned to them at no cost. Allowing police the discretion to seize vehicles of suspected drug traffickers is not a punishment but, instead, an action designed to promote community safety for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank once again the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this bill that clearly attempts to promote safety within our communities. I would also like to applaud this government for its commitment to strong, vibrant communities, and I would ask all members to join with me in support of community safety by standing in support of Bill 209.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and speak to Bill 209, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. The proposed legislation intends to increase safety on Alberta's roadways by preventing those who are drug trafficking from operating motor vehicles. The intent of this bill, brought forth by the hon. Member for Strathcona, is admirable, and a discussion on improving safety for Albertans will always be welcome on this side of the House.

Bill 209 would enhance public safety by holding those drivers who use their vehicles for dangerous purposes accountable by withholding their licences. The bill requires a conviction of drug trafficking or possession with the intent to traffic while the individual is operating a vehicle. Upon being found guilty, the province would have the authority to disqualify the individual from holding a driver's licence for a period of one year from the date of conviction.

I believe the effects of implementing Bill 209 could be far

reaching in terms of providing Albertans with safer communities. Mr. Speaker, this government takes public safety very seriously and makes good use of a number of ways to remove dangerous drivers from Alberta's streets and roadways. Currently there are several ways for Alberta's authorities to suspend and disqualify an individual's licence. Upon conviction a licence can be suspended or disqualified for numerous reasons, including drunk driving or reckless driving. These measures are used to deter the individual from driving their vehicle on Alberta's roadways and endangering the lives of others. Whether it is for six months or one year, the offender should not be able to reoffend, and Bill 209 may prevent this from happening.

Mr. Speaker, committing a dangerous crime can create a ripple effect that can have not only serious consequences for those involved but for the entire community. When you neutralize hazardous threats to our roadways, you protect not only those behind the wheel but pedestrians, innocent bystanders, and friends and families of the victims. It also threatens the sense of well-being that a community feels and creates an uneasy sense that they are not safe.

Dangerous criminal behaviour increases the cost to authorities, who wish to reassure those living within the area, by forcing them to hire extra manpower for surveillance, for example. While this is not a revelation to many Albertans, solutions to controlling this problem are less known. The far-reaching impact these criminal activities have on the entire province requires an equally extensive approach that can deter them from happening. I believe that the idea behind Bill 209 is one way to promote safer communities.

Through licence suspension the Alberta government would have a chance to hold those individuals who use their vehicle in a dangerous manner accountable for their actions and may be able to reduce the chance of serious consequences. Mr. Speaker, drug traffickers should be held accountable and take responsibility for the fact that they are endangering the lives and safety of others. Revoking their capacity to drive would be one way to ensure safety on Alberta's streets and roadways.

In conclusion, Bill 209 holds accountable those individuals who use their vehicles for dangerous purposes through licence suspension or disqualification. Mr. Speaker, I believe that this bill intends to further enhance the safety of not only Alberta's roadways but of our communities as well.

There is another piece of legislation that intends to achieve goals similar to those of Bill 209. Bill 50, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, intends to achieve similar goals put forth in Bill 209. As the hon. Member for Strathcona previously mentioned, Bill 50 may be able to deter those involved in criminal activity by inhibiting their ability to drive on Alberta roadways. This may curb these dangerous activities and risks and increase safety for Alberta communities. Therefore, I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join the debate on Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. It's been mentioned by many of the speakers before me that the intent of this bill – and I certainly applaud the hon. member for bringing this forward – is to improve the safety on Alberta's highways by preventing drivers involved in the drug trade from being able to operate their motor vehicles, a key piece of equipment, I would say, in this hideous trade, from being able to ply their trade.

Mr. Speaker, people arrested for all types of drug offences are

shown to commit significantly more traffic violations and tend to be more involved in traffic accidents, including a disproportionate number of single-vehicle accidents, which lead to more injuries and fatality accidents. People who sell drugs to support their own habits are more likely to drive while high than any other drug user in the general population. I'm just reminded of a conviction this week for an individual who was high on drugs and killed two individuals while he was travelling down the roadway. I believe that anything we can do in this Legislature to mitigate this risk to our travelling public will be certainly worth our while as legislators.

The business of trafficking involves distracting activity such as the use of cellphones, driving at night, and the frequent presence on the road. Driver distraction occurs when the driver's focus is on anything other than what he should be paying attention to; that is, the primary task of driving. The risk of driver error is increased and, of course, the chances for collisions. Drivers who talk on phones while driving tend to be much more likely to get into accidents.

Mr. Speaker, drug traffickers frequently drive at night, and this poses a great safety threat. Drug traffickers do not have the safety tools or policies in place to ensure the safety of others while driving at night. Too often they're caught up in what they're doing, and the last thing they're worried about is, of course, the safety of even themselves and the others around them. Dealers may also do some preparatory work such as bagging of the drugs while driving from place to place. Drug traffickers and users are more likely to engage in these risky behaviours, including speeding to get through traffic lights, driving tired, or driving over the speed limit.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, drug trafficking involves dangerous and illegal activities, and violence is associated and connected with drug trafficking. Bill 209 promotes safer highways and communities. This bill intends to help eliminate the business of drug trafficking from Alberta's highways, and I think we can't do that too soon. Bill 209 addresses the government of Alberta's priority of providing safe and secure communities for all Albertans. This bill accurately identifies the safety hazards and risks that are associated with drug trafficking.

Amending the Traffic Safety Act is not the only option for attaining safer communities, Mr. Speaker. Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, intends to achieve similar goals as put forth in Bill 209.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to further debate on this bill, and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, being put forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona. I doubt there is a member of this Assembly who would disagree that drug trafficking poses a serious threat to the safety of our communities. Most of us here are mothers or fathers who care deeply about the communities we raise our children in, and we will go to any length to make sure they grow up around streets and in neighbourhoods that are safe, secure, and free of violence.

I fully acknowledge that this government has an aggressive plan to make sure that Alberta's neighbourhoods are safe, but there is still more work to be done. We here as members of the Legislature must examine every possible option with the goal of making our communities safer. I believe the intent of Bill 209 will help in our ongoing efforts to make Alberta's communities the safest they can possibly be.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force heard from a good number of Albertans about the criminal elements they face in their communities, and it released a comprehensive report a year ago detailing steps we should take to address these nefarious influences. The report laid the groundwork for us to build laws and take measures that will protect our citizens, their children, and our neighbourhoods as Alberta continues to face the challenges of rapid population growth.

I believe that the actual business of drug trafficking, the movement of narcotics on city streets, poses serious threats to the pedestrians and motorists who use our roads. Therefore, we should not consider Bill 209 as some sort of punishment for breaching drug laws. Rather, Bill 209 should be approached as yet another tool at our disposal to ensure that our streets are the safest they can possibly be. A drug trafficker behind the wheel is a danger to everyone who uses the road, motorists and pedestrians alike, Mr. Speaker.

Complicating matters is that drug trafficking does not only go down in dark alleys or industrial parks after business hours. Imagine one of these drivers ripping down your quiet residential street, where your children are out playing street hockey or basketball, because they have a customer at the end of the block. I do not ever want to see that on my street, Mr. Speaker. Knowing these types of drivers are on the road makes me uncomfortable and fuels my desire for a mechanism that would help to get them off the road. By empowering police to seize the vehicles involved in drug trafficking and disqualifying convicted traffickers from driving, we will be removing a major element of danger from our province's streets and highways.

As the cliché goes, Mr. Speaker, driving is a privilege and not a right. In my view, convicted drug traffickers have forfeited that privilege and should no longer be entrusted to drive along with motorists who obey the laws and have a high regard for safe streets. The bill would make sure that those traffickers are kept where they should be, far away from a steering wheel and gas pedal and off our streets. I think we can all agree that safer streets mean safer communities.

As Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force stated, "Drugs are the basic bread and butter for gangs and organized crime in the province." Drug trafficking is having a serious impact on our quality of life, and it touches way too many people. I acknowledge the considerable steps this government has taken regarding the effect of drug use in Alberta, but I would submit that Bill 209's intent would help us attack the problem from a whole other angle. If we can somehow disrupt the flow of drugs at the neighbourhood level, we may be able to prevent that next teenager from getting addicted and deter them from future drug trafficking.

Without the means to conduct their trade, frustrated traffickers will find their business prospects suddenly limited, shrinking significantly their marketplace at worst and perhaps forcing them out of the trade altogether. Removing these reckless drivers from the road should be a no-brainer. They are the scourge of our streets, and every motorist, cyclist, and pedestrian would be better off without them. The fewer of them on the road, the safer our streets become. It really is as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. Bill 209's intent is justified and reasonable, and it is important that we exhaust all avenues in order to achieve Bill 209's objective because we do have to do everything we can to reduce the safety hazards that are connected to drug trafficking.

Amending the Traffic Safety Act is not the only option for attaining safer communities. As the hon. Member for Strathcona previously mentioned, Bill 50 is another piece of legislation that intends to achieve similar goals to that of Bill 209. Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act,

2008, will join a number of positive initiatives we have already taken to honour the objective of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force to make Alberta's communities safer and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system. That being said, I believe that the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, is the legislation that will achieve the intent of Bill 209.

I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the pages will circulate this amendment, and we'll just stop until it's circulated about. As this amendment is being circulated, let me just review the rules associated with it. We will now move to a debate on the amendment, and then at the conclusion of the debate on the amendment a vote will take place. We have an amendment before us. I'll just wait before recognizing anyone.

As this is a bill introduced by the hon. Member for Strathcona, I would invite the hon. member to participate if he chooses to.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and share some final thoughts on Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. I would like to say thank you to all the members of the Assembly for rising and speaking to Bill 209. I appreciate all the feedback and the informative debate. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to speak about such an important issue that affects all Albertans.

As I already mentioned in my opening speech, my intention for this bill was to increase traffic safety on Alberta's highways by preventing drivers who are involved in the drug trade from operating motor vehicles. I would like to reiterate that Bill 209 is not meant to punish people for breaking drug laws; it's a mechanism or tool to be used by law enforcement. Bill 209 would hold drug traffickers accountable and responsible for putting Albertans' lives and safety at risk. The intent of this bill is in line with other legislation in Alberta and follows the objective of the Safe Communities Task Force, which is to make Alberta communities safer and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.

5:10

Drug trafficking involves dangerous and illegal activities. The number of trafficking charges has steadily increased over the last few years. Drug trafficking puts all Albertans' lives at risk, Mr. Speaker. There are many things in life that we have no control over, but we have the power to create legislation that will help protect Albertans, and I think it's a worthwhile cause. As I mentioned earlier, Bill 50, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, plans to achieve similar goals put forth in Bill 209.

On a final note, I'd like to recognize the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General for their input on Bill 209 and their work on amending the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, which should also protect our streets and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sometimes wonder about the exercise we go through with private members' bills. We've spent the better part of over an hour complimenting the hon. Member for Strathcona on Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008. Numerous members have referenced how it is in line with other pieces of legislation. I referenced Bill 39 from two years ago, the Highway Safety Amendment Act. I also referenced Bill 49, that had to do with removing drug-affected drivers from the highway similarly to legislation we have with individuals suffering the effects of alcohol while driving. We've had members reference Bill 50, which is the victims' compensation bill, which would see money taken from the proceeds of crime being turned over to support the victims of those crimes.

Every single member who spoke up until this last member, who also spoke in favour of the legislation, agreed that this was a good piece of legislation. People spoke from both their heart and their head on the effects of drug trafficking. They spoke about the need to get individuals who traffic off the roads, whether it was during the night, as the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon spoke about, or driving through the streets during the day, as the Member for Lethbridge-West addressed.

We have spent a considerable amount of time and intellectual energy talking about what a good piece of legislation Bill 209 is. Every single member, basically, recognized the efforts of the hon. Member for Strathcona in putting forward this piece of legislation. They praised his intent. They praised the result that would occur with the passing of Bill 209. So we've gone through this exercise. Every single individual who spoke, without exception, praised this particular bill and its intent.

To come to this point in the afternoon at 5:15 on Monday, the 24th of November, and suggest that after all the positive discussion on this bill that has taken place, we now hoist it and have it read at some point six months hence suggests also that at some point six months hence we will continue our discussion. I'm understanding, possibly, that the intention of this hoist amendment is simply to kill the bill as opposed to bringing it six months hence. It would have to come back, I gather, before December 31, which is not possible; therefore, it's going to die on the Order Paper.

The death of this bill after all the positive discussion just makes it an oratory exercise as opposed to truly trying to improve the situation and remove drug dealers from our streets.

So many individuals have referenced, for example, the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek brought forth. I had an opportunity twice to testify at that task force hearing, once at the University of Calgary, and I had a second opportunity to bring forward concerns at a hotel on 16th Avenue N.E., formerly the Crossroads. It was a very good task force. This piece of legislation, Bill 209, fits completely into that task force's intent. I respect the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for having chaired what I believe was a very successful task force in trying to reduce crime and encourage safe communities. Now, I realize that we are going to have to have supporting legislation, and we're going to have to have enforcement in the way of increased police officers to have this outcome that Bill 209 and the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force had in their intent.

The importance of getting rid of addictions or drugs at the school level was brought up by an hon. member. I apologize for not remembering which of the hon. government members brought it forward. This would have provided an opportunity for discussion in

schools about the dangers of drugs. Our whole *Hansard* from this afternoon would have made for a wonderful lesson plan on warning pupils of the dangers of drug addiction and drug trafficking, yet this discussion will have come to naught because the bill is effectively being killed and will not be read again before December 31.

When I spoke at the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, I spoke about the importance of having resource officers in the schools so that they could talk to students and create a relationship with them. I'm sure that with resource officers in the schools they would have brought up, as they do on a travelling basis – when I was in F.E. Osborne junior high school, we had drug squad and gang squad individuals come into our rooms and talk to our kids about the dangers of drugs and the effects of drug trafficking.

Again, we have this wonderful piece of legislation that we have throughout the afternoon supported, and I am very sincere when I offer my condolences to the hon. Member for Strathcona. I would hope that each individual who spoke today on the wisdom of this bill and its intent to remove drug traffickers' ability to have the negative effect that they have had on communities through the seizures of their vehicles will, if called to a standing vote, either shout their defiance to the notion of this hoist loudly and clearly so that the Assembly understands the intent or would potentially join me in standing up in support of this Bill 209, Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008.

I think that those of us who spoke in favour of the legislation owe it to the hon. Member for Strathcona to stand up and support that member. And this argument is coming from a member of the

opposition who frequently has difficulty with pieces of legislation put forward by the government. Here is an opportunity for us to stand up and show our support for the hon. Member for Strathcona, whose intention was clearly indicated through Bill 209, the Traffic Safety (Driver Disqualification and Seizure of Vehicles Arising from Drug Offences) Amendment Act, 2008.

5:20

Throughout the afternoon we've recognized this private member's bill's value, its intent. We've spoken about what we would hope would result from this bill, and I would encourage all members to support this Bill 209 getting into the Committee of the Whole stage and, if time permits, going into third reading.

The Speaker: Additional participants?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 209 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this means that this particular bill is now dropped from the Order Paper.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we call it 5:30 and stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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