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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2008

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated, hon. members.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Official Provincial Sport

514. Dr. Taft moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to make rodeo Alberta's official sport.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a real pleasure for me to rise this evening. I'm going to speak and give a little background on why I think this is a good idea. I look forward to the debate, and we'll see how the vote goes. It's really a simple motion but one that has a very special meaning for me and one that I hope speaks to and recognizes an important facet of Alberta's history.

Twenty-two days ago I donned my cowboy duds and appeared before this Assembly to honour the Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International and to suggest to this Assembly and the people of Alberta that rodeo deserves to be enshrined as our official sport. That week, Mr. Speaker, I was able to take in an event at the beginning of the week, the heritage rodeo, which had very traditional events in it with which, frankly, I was less familiar. I was also able to take in the last day of the Canadian Finals Rodeo and sit with some genuine rodeo people, people who had actually competed in rodeo. It's always an extra delight to watch rodeo with people who have actually competed because you just learn the details of the sport.

I have very personal reasons for hoping the province will recognize rodeo as its official sport. I am a city boy, Mr. Speaker, but the truth is that I've been an avid follower of rodeo since childhood. I remember attending rodeos at the old Edmonton Gardens before there was a coliseum here. One of my earliest memories is an adventure as a young boy – I was perhaps 10 years old – getting on the Dayliner from Edmonton and riding by myself down to Calgary to attend the Calgary Stampede with my uncle who lived in Calgary. That was the highlight of that summer. I've attended the Ponoka Stampede pretty often for more than 20 years now, taking in the parade and the stampede events and the fair and so on.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I have never been disappointed by the shows put on by the cowboys and their magnificent animals, and no wonder because generations of Alberta cowboys have been perfecting the sport of rodeo since the late 1800s. In fact, if you read the history of rodeo – and I recommend to everybody kind of a fun book by Hugh Dempsey, who was a senior official at the Glenbow Museum, I think the senior archivist. The book is called *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History*, and it's a good basic source of the history on rodeo in Alberta.

Rodeo arose in the late 1800s in Alberta as a natural outgrowth of one of our oldest industries. Right after fur trading and before agriculture, before farming, Alberta's earliest settlers were roping and riding on the ranch. The sport evolved quite naturally. It's not hard to imagine. The first events were informal affairs occurring spontaneously on real working Alberta ranches. According to Hugh Dempsey's book, "If two cowboys had an argument about their

prowess with a rope or wrestling a steer, a contest was the best way to settle it." You can just imagine on a quiet afternoon with all the cowboys around the ranch how those kinds of competitions would automatically arise.

It didn't take long for other Albertans to discover the inherent entertainment value of such wild and exciting tests of skill. Since the first Calgary Stampede was promoted and organized by well-known western performer Guy Weadick in 1912, Alberta has been recognized as a centre for rodeo across the world. I will note here, Mr. Speaker, that Guy Weadick was a great-uncle of the current Member for Lethbridge-West.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, rodeo is so much more than an athletic event or a tourist attraction. Rodeo demonstrates and preserves our western heritage by reminding us of the importance of ranching and agriculture in western Canada. Some people might ask: well, why not recognize hockey as our official sport or maybe football, especially given the many Grey Cup victories of the Calgary Stampeders and the Edmonton Eskimos? Well, whether it's the Calgary Stampede or the Canadian Finals or the Ponoka Stampede or the Thorhild rodeo or any one of the dozens and dozens of other rodeos around Alberta, Albertans from across the province clearly love this sport. No other sport carries such a deep connection to our province's land and history, and that connection has played a huge role in Alberta's economic growth and cultural development. While other industries may have a bigger slice of the economic pie these days, ranching and farming remain vital forces and continue to greatly influence our society to this day.

Mr. Speaker, in the majority of the smaller Alberta towns and rural communities annual events are planned around rodeos. As Leader of the Opposition I've driven all over this province, and time and again I'm struck going past the smallest little town that there'll be a sign up at the side of the road saying, you know: next weekend, rodeo. It's a source of great pride no matter how small the town. Local contestants who compete in these small-town rodeos are the future athletes who will astound audiences at the bigger rodeos across Canada and the United States. Rodeo is a sport that celebrates our roots, showcases our artists, boosts our businesses, and draws countless tourists to Alberta each and every year.

I think it's also important to make note of the incredible quality of Alberta's rodeo stock. Alberta's rodeo animals are renowned as among the finest in the world, and a number of our stock suppliers, both fully private ones and ones like the Calgary Stampede Ranch, routinely provide stock to the finest rodeos in the world.

Mr. Speaker, rodeo is alive, well, and flourishing in Alberta and deserves to be recognized as our official sport. Having drawn support from rodeos across the province, I want to table two letters today, including one from the Central Alberta Rodeo Association and one from the Ponoka Stampede. The one from the Central Alberta Rodeo Association reads as follows.

In response to your recent letter, regarding a motion to the Alberta Legislature, to adopt Rodeo as the Official Sport of Alberta.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf [of] the Central Alberta Rodeo Association to confirm our support with this intended motion.

One thing I would like to add, the majority of the smaller Alberta towns' yearly community events are centred around Rodeos. Contestants who attend these small town Rodeos are the future of our bigger Rodeos, like the Calgary Stampede and Canadian Finals Rodeo.

This letter is signed by Ab Brewster, president, Central Alberta Rodeo Association.

The other letter that I would like to table, Mr. Speaker, is from the Ponoka Stampede Association.

Dear Mr. Taft,

The Ponoka Stampede, Canada's largest seven day professional rodeo, is a major annual tourism attraction for the Province of Alberta. The Stampede began in 1936 as a single day event and has grown to become a seven day show. Ponoka draws the top cowboys in the world and is famous for its top rodeo stock.

However, the Ponoka Stampede is much more than simply an event and a tourist attraction. It is, more than anything else, a tradition that demonstrates and preserves our Western Heritage.

We therefore, most certainly endorse your motion to make rodeo Alberta's official sport and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the motion.

With those letters, Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the Assembly to join in tonight's debate and support rodeo becoming Alberta's official sport. Thank you.

7:40

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since having the privilege of joining this Assembly back in March, I've found that although I went to school a few years, there are many people who have many more years than I have, including the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who has a PhD. One quote that he mentioned from *Hansard* of October 21 is: "It's always a thrill to stand up in this Assembly and speak to the attentive crowd here. And I welcome them to speak, too. I'll listen attentively to you." I welcome that invitation for further debate here.

On this topic, Mr. Speaker, I've just had a chance to go through some of the media fanfare on this. It has got quite a bit of attention. I will table two articles here. The first one is Taft's Stetson Must Be Too Tight, Valerie Fortney, *Calgary Herald*, November 7. Some quotes in here. Ken King, president and CEO of the Calgary Flames, says: "I don't understand the concept of an 'official sport'. Why do we have to pick one? What is that going to do for us as a province?" The same article quotes Orest Korbutt, director of the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, indicating: "I . . . don't think rodeo has enough presence everywhere in people's lives to warrant the title." Finally, in the same article Cory Mack indicates: "The Alberta Sports Hall of Fame has more than 600 inductees. Less than 20 . . . people are in rodeo. How can we say that's our No. 1 sport?"

The second article that I will also table, Mr. Speaker, is entitled Liberal Leader Wants Rodeo To Be Alberta's Official Sport. His verbiage was: "Alberta doesn't even have an official sport. It struck me right away, well, it should be rodeo. What is more Alberta than rodeo?"

Now, just getting to my comment here, I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is very well intentioned in this respect. That being said, I do have to respectfully disagree that rodeo should be our official sport. In fact, my submission to this House, Mr. Speaker, is that there should not be an official sport for this province. While rodeo is obviously important to Alberta, there are a number of other sports which have similar historical and cultural significance, such as lacrosse, canoeing, curling, and hockey, just to name a few.

Now, like the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I am a city boy. In fact, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was saying to me earlier that the reason I'm against this is because he's probably not seen me in a cowboy hat before. Maybe there is some truth to that comment. But I have been to the rodeo before. The rodeo king or queen or princess has always been there. My friend Jennifer Bell had never been to a rodeo. This year she came down from Edmonton, and we looked to take in the rodeo. We went to Wendy's afterwards.

Regardless of what we may think of rodeo here, Albertans are passionate about their sports teams. Many Albertans support several

sports for a wide range of reasons. With respect, it does not seem possible to select just one sport to be representative of our province.

Current research highlights health and societal consequences of inactivity. We hope to achieve better levels of health and physical activity by encouraging Albertans to participate in the broadest possible range of sports. I agree that promoting activity is important, Mr. Speaker.

As we all know, hockey is a very popular sport in Alberta and Canada. More Albertans relate to hockey than to rodeo. Many people watch and/or play hockey, and most kids play hockey or street hockey. There are many hockey clubs in Alberta, which range from the minor leagues to professional hockey teams. Everyone has of course heard of the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. Hockey obviously bridges the gap between rural communities and cities. There are television channels that play hockey games all night in the winter. Hockey is a winter sport that's suitable for our province because it's cold for more than six months of the year. If we are to adopt an official sport, we should at least choose a sport that the majority of Albertans are interested in participating in.

Another sport, obviously, is football. Football is a popular sport. Alberta has two CFL teams, the Edmonton Eskimos and Calgary Stampeders. Contrary to popular belief, Mr. Speaker, I may be from Saskatchewan, but I bleed red. The Eskimos have dedicated fans as well. This is why the team has been the leader in attendance for many years. Attendance at the Calgary Stampeders games ranges between 24,000 to 36,000 people. The attendance alone for these two teams shows the popularity of football and the importance that the sport has for Alberta.

Soccer is another sport that many Albertans enjoy and can afford to participate in. There are many opportunities for children and adults to play soccer no matter what their skill level is.

One sport dear to my heart, Mr. Speaker, is speed skating. Shortly after moving to Alberta, I met an Olympic speed skater named Jamie Ivey. We cannot forget or preclude Alberta's many other sports, and this is one of them. The Olympic Oval has been home to the fastest ice in the world, attracting the best athletes from Canada and across the world to come train and compete in Calgary's world-class facility. Thousands of visitors, public skaters, athletes, and coaches come to the Olympic Oval every year. Of course, this was constructed for the 1988 Olympic Winter Games.

Now, I alluded earlier to the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, Mr. Speaker. We have seven inductees in baseball, 57 from basketball, 275 from football, 201 from hockey, 13 from speed skating, and 14 from rodeo.

I also would be remiss if I did not mention that people with physical disabilities cannot participate in rodeo like they can in most other sports. We want to adopt a sport, again, that ideally all Albertans can participate in. Some examples for disabled people include five-a-side football, wheelchair baseball, ice sledge hockey, wheelchair curling, and Paralympic table tennis. A couple more include Paralympic sitting volleyball and cross-country skiing.

Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for rodeo specifically as well as for the Calgary Stampede, part of which is in my constituency of Calgary-Egmont, as well as for the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. I know he sits on the Stampede board. But the foregoing notwithstanding, I've mentioned my reasons. I do not feel that we should have an official sport, and I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against this motion.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this motion. Although I now reside in the city and have, really, for the last 31 years since my birth

in the Holy Cross hospital, for the first seven years of my life I did reside in the country. For two years I resided in Strathmore, Alberta, where my dad was a schoolteacher, and then we moved to Hussar for the next five years, where my dad served as the local principal.

One of my earliest memories as a child is the coming of Hussar Daze. Everyone in town knew that the most fun weekend in town was Hussar Daze. My first real memory, actually, of Hussar is when I was about four years old, and I got to pull my little sister in sort of a makeshift truck that my grandfather had made, and on the side of it it said: Hehr's Trucking. I pulled the Hehr's truck, and my sister rode in the back, and we went in the Hussar Daze parade. It was just before the rodeo started, and then the whole town went down to the rodeo and had a wonderful time. That was one of my first real memories as a child, and everyone knew that that was an exciting day.

Another memory in Hussar, this one fraught with both some happiness and some fear, is that a couple of years later my parents thought it was a good idea for me to enter into the Strathmore-Hussar rodeo school. At that time that was taught by the Johansen brothers. Now, many in this House may know Dale, Don, Bruce, and Guy. Two of those, Dale and Guy, have won the Calgary Stampede, and Dale has also won the Canadian Finals Rodeo, so a real rodeo family here in Alberta. Actually, my dad, I believe, taught two of the boys and often said to them, "You should come to class more." They'd say, "Well, Mr. Hehr, that's fine, but we're going to become professional rodeoers." They did, and they certainly did very well in their sport.

Anyway, I attended this rodeo school – I was only seven at the time – and the Johansen boys, being relatively nice people and understanding that I really couldn't ride very well, always put me on the smallest bull. So while the other kids got on the big bulls and they were jumping around, when it came my turn, they gave me a little calf. The chute door would open, and I would go out. Everyone would clap, and I'd fall off and run to the side.

Anyway, later on in the summer – my father clearly didn't come and see any of those events – he thought it was good that his son, having this training at the hands of this fine rodeo family, should be able to ride in the Rockyford Rodeo. So he in his wisdom paid the \$50 entry fee, and his seven-year-old son was going to compete in the rodeo that afternoon.

Well, let me tell you something. I walked up to the chutes with my cowboy hat on, and all of a sudden the cows or the steer did not look similar to the ones that Dale, Donny, Bruce, and Guy had been putting me on at their local family ranch. I immediately started crying. But my dad grabbed me and grabbed Donny Johansen. My dad, I think, had been sitting with his friends in the stands there. I'm not sure what they do there in the stands, but I'm pretty sure he might have had a pop or two over there. He looked at Donny Johansen and said, "Don, that steer isn't any bigger than the ones Kent was riding out at your place in Strathmore, is it?" Clear as a bell Donny Johansen said: "No. That has to be about the same size, Dick. Yeah, I'm pretty sure about that."

Nevertheless, I knew they were pulling my leg. I was balling my eyes out, but still, since they told me that, I would give it a try. Well, Mr. Speaker, I got on that bull, rode it, fell butt over tea kettle, but, needless to say, I have a fond memory of it. A teacher in the crowd named Frieda Brown snapped a picture when I was actually on the steer. It's up in my home should anyone want to come and look at it.

7:50

Nonetheless, those types of experiences are around for people in small towns from many places: Claresholm, Ponoka, Hussar, Strathmore, wherever. Look at what happens in Calgary every summer, the 10 days of the Stampede, clearly one of the most fun

times whether you're a city boy or a country boy. The CFRs here in Edmonton have been going on now since 1974. Clearly, it's a great time for members of this city and for members of the outlying communities to get together, to celebrate, I guess, what has become familiar to Albertans. I believe it's the time when our communities best get together, care, share, and play together, and as such rodeo should be recognized as that, a thing that has brought our communities together where we recognize, really, the spirit and the fun of being alive. Far too few times do we do that as human beings, and rodeo has managed to do that for Albertans.

It has been a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Motion 514, that Alberta should make rodeo its sport of choice, just for the simple fact, Mr. Speaker, that it brings Albertans together and celebrates the best of us as a community. I would urge all my members to recognize that and vote in favour of this motion for exactly that reason.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, thank you. I have so far seven members still on the list to speak. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this will probably be the shortest speech I've ever made as an MLA. I love the spirit of rodeo, I love cowboys, and I love Alberta. I can't think of anything more appropriate than making rodeo Alberta's unique, official sport, and I support Motion 514.

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite interested in this motion. As you know, the hon. member was once – I'm not sure if he still is – the agriculture critic. He doesn't get up on agriculture very often. I'm quite interested to hear some of his statements about how he values agriculture and rodeo. My natural instinct would say, you know, that this is a pretty good idea, but maybe it's going to depend a little bit on some of the answers he might give on his wrap-up here because what buffaloes me just a little bit, perhaps, is that the hon. member kind of likes to attack a little bit about farm safety once in a while.

In his own opening remarks he also mentioned the fact about being out on the ranch and the young fellows getting into the rodeo spirit of things, and I'm not sure if he's ever been involved in that. I would suspect that he probably has at some time or other because I think we farm boys kind of like to trick our urban friends into coming out and probably having a little go at riding the 4-H steer you're bringing up or maybe the steer's mother or maybe, a little further, the steer's father, perhaps, if you get a chance to do that. It probably doesn't lend itself real well to farm safety when you think about it, but that's the way we do things, and I guess that's why I defend the farm way of life and common sense. In some respects I suspect there are a few bruises and cuts and whatnot, but common sense probably does prevail in these circumstances. So perhaps it's just a little bit of an irony, I guess.

The other one – and he doesn't take the shots at me so much with this one – is horse racing in Alberta. I wonder if the hon. member can relate to how most rodeos have some form of horse racing associated with them. I'd like to hear his comments on that particular issue. I guess he may want to try and explain that it's very different from rodeo, but in most cases it's pretty tightly wound to rodeo, that what happens is some form of horse racing. I know that out in our country, down at Priddis, they have quarter horse races, and they have rodeo, and it's all wound into one with the entertainment.

The other part of it, I guess, is that maybe most of the rodeos that the two hon. members mentioned have chuckwagon races. I'd be the last person to come down on chuckwagon races. I don't think that I enjoy anything more at a rodeo. If I did come down on chuckwagon races, I'd have to face my wife because she'd go to every one in the province if she could do that. I wonder if the hon. member knows where all the horses that end up in a chuckwagon race come from originally. Of course, they're all thoroughbred horses that don't make it on the race track. I wonder if that ever entered into his thoughts about making the rodeo Alberta's sport.

Now, I'm not going to speak against this motion because I think that probably as ag minister that would be kind of a foolish thing to do, to be honest with you. I just would hope that he would maybe make a comment on some of the issues that I brought up. If he does and I'm quite happy with it, I'm going to support this motion, by the way.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I stand up to speak to this motion and not just because my leader brought it forward. I want to go back in history, and there are a few people in this room, not many but a few of them, who can go back to Saturday afternoon movies with Roy Rogers, the Lone Ranger, Gene Autry, Lash LaRue, and the list goes on.

Dr. Taft: Hopalong Cassidy.

Ms Pastoor: Hopalong Cassidy, another one.

When I was a little kid, I was a city girl, and it was my first exposure to all the excitement of horses. You know, really, everybody wants to be a cowboy or a cowgirl. If you don't believe me, I want you to check the bar of every town that has a rodeo because they're all cowboys during rodeo days. In downtown Calgary and even downtown Edmonton on rodeo days everybody is a cowboy.

One of the things that I'd like to speak to is that here in this province we're kind of big on official things. We have official flowers. We have an official fish. We have an official grass. We have an official tree. We have historical houses. We have an official song. We're big on official things. We're big on having something for ourselves. Hockey has been mentioned, but that's already been taken because it is named the Canadian sport. Soccer is a great sport, and many, many people play it. However, it doesn't go back to our roots. It doesn't really reflect the kind of people that made Alberta.

The kind of people that made Alberta were cowboys and farmers. A lot of our farmers and cowboys are one in the same. Anyone in dryland farming often had cattle as well as the grains. It really, really is the core of what made Alberta. Not only that, but that business of working with the land, that business of being independent has still come through in our society today. It's what I hear a lot from the other side of the House: independence, looking after yourself, being responsible, exactly what you are if you're a rodeo cowboy.

8:00

One of the things that these people do is expand their horizons. Guys who look after horses are responsible for something outside of themselves, and I really believe that people who look after something besides themselves have something to contribute to society. Our cowboys and our cowgirls look after many horses. Also, it has already been mentioned about the stock. We have amazing stock, and stock takes a lot of work. It takes people out in 30 below zero

weather to make sure that those animals are looked after, particularly during the period when they're having their colts to make sure that those colts are going to make it through the cold winter.

If you ever watch a rodeo and watch the people, there are very many people required to put on a rodeo. They really are very selfless. Everyone helps everyone else. Despite the fact that they're all in competition, they help each other. Some guy's saddle strap – what do you call that thing underneath the saddle? – or cinch breaks, and someone will loan him a saddle. They loan each other equipment if that's what it takes to make sure that everybody gets into the competition.

Again, when I was a child, I was very lucky. My father brought me to the Stampede when I was probably seven. I had a complete outfit with a holster and a gun and the pants and the boots. I was actually pretty good at the quick draw. I really was pretty good. I have never lost that love of rodeo. I have never lost that love of horses. They're not going to admit it, but I think that every man in Alberta would just love to say that they stayed on a bull. They certainly like to do it when they have those phoney bulls in the bars, the mechanical bulls. My, oh, my, there has been many a cowboy that has tried that, or at least they thought they were a cowboy.

I really think that the cowboy culture is deep into our souls. Certainly, women in particular as well would love to do the barrel racing. It's exciting. It's fast. You have to be at one with the animal. It isn't just you doing it. It's not unlike watching the jumping at Spruce Meadows. You really must be at one with your horse, or you're not going to go over, the two of you. The horse may go over, but you're going to get dumped off. These people are at one with nature.

One of the other things that is important, certainly, for me in my area is that we actually have a rodeo school in Cardston. Kids go to high school and then do their rodeo training afterwards. Clearly, it is a very important sport. It's a very important activity. It isn't just a sport; it's an activity that everyone gets involved with. You see little kids riding on horses. It starts at a very early age. Also, you can see many, many older people still enjoying riding their horses.

One of the things that's huge in this province also is horse breeding. It is a huge industry and creates a lot of money in our province.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Horse racing?

Ms Pastoor: I didn't say horse racing; I said horse breeding.

Many of those horses are used for roping. Most of those horses are used for team roping and calf roping and those sorts of things.

Another thing that those horses are used for is penning. Penning is a huge up-and-coming part, I would say, of what is soon to be an event in rodeo. Three people are in an arena and have to cut calves out of a herd that is at the end of the arena, and they have to get them penned all in a certain time. It is huge and growing.

Again, it's about animals. It's about our culture. It's about loving our nature. It's about loving where we came from. I think that to make this a sport, we are also acknowledging everything that we stand for: the independence, where we came from, and the fact that it isn't dying out. It truly is increasing in interest. Somebody right in downtown Calgary that has just come over from the Philippines may not know what we're talking about, but rest assured that they're going to take their kid to the Calgary Stampede.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask everyone in this House to support this fabulous motion.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I don't have any problem whatsoever supporting this motion for a couple of reasons. One, I don't think it diminishes any other sport to have one picked. I mean, we sat here and we picked a grass and we picked a flower and we picked a fish. That didn't make any other grass mad or the fish upset. They went on with their lives as they, quite frankly, don't care what we do in here. I think we maybe finally named something that actually does care what we do in here.

The biggest part of being able to support rodeo is the fact that if you don't perform and win, you don't get paid. Now, I'm an Oilers fan, but I'm sure the Flames fans could on occasion admit that you go down to the arena and you watch people making millions of dollars take a night off, and they still get their paycheque. Some of them take a year off. As a matter of fact, some of them sign the big one and you never see them again. Well, in rodeo you're only as good as your last event. If you get bucked off the horse or off the bull or your calf gets away, a big fat zero. Like the announcer says, all they get is your applause. That says something to me. In many ways it's like golf. If you don't win, you go home empty-handed. If there were a reason why I would be hesitant it's that this free health care we have in rodeo may be at odds.

Probably the most important reason to try and understand why this is important is the simple fact that there are growing numbers of people out there who have no concept of what true animal welfare is all about. You hear the people from some of the groups, whether it's PETA or the other groups, that have no concept of what a healthy horse actually looks like and how much care goes into all of the animals that go into the rodeo and how important it is that they're healthy because without healthy animals, they won't perform.

The changes that they've made in rodeo in the last few years – putting protective gear around the horns and the ears of the steers that they're going to wrestle and throw, changing the rules on calf roping so you can't pull a calf over backwards – are all done from a positive and a real sense of care for these animals.

We still have cattle on the farm, Mr. Speaker, and we use horses when we're doing branding in the spring. Twenty years ago, or 30 years ago maybe now, we were all a bunch of young guys, and we thought this was great fun, to head into them and tackle these calves and wrestle them around and throw them down. Well, we hurt far more people and far more calves trying to do it like that than we do now when they just go in with the horses, rope their back feet, drag them over by the fire, hold their heads sometimes in a rubberized loop or someone will sit on it. There is far less stress on the animals, and they're let up and go away. The real rodeo normally happens about an hour and a half after we're done and we're reliving the olden days.

Back to the point of the lack of understanding of rodeo by many people who have obviously had no exposure to it or may have only seen it at the rodeo. If you sit in the stands here at the CFR and watch the horses that are going to bulldog or calf rope, those horses are as in tune with what's going on as the cowboy is. Watch their ears. Watch the excitement. If you've been around the chuck-wagons, those horses love to run just as much as, you know, your dog is happy to see you when you go home or the cat that comes along and pretends they're indifferent. You have horses that literally know what's going on, and they are excited. They prance and dance, and they go. It truly is one of the few things where you have a combination of animal and man or a competition.

8:10

Now, I would have to admit that when the CFR has the one event where four people – and I'm not sure of the criteria – go out in the

arena and sit around a poker table, and then they turn a bull loose, what it shows you for sure is that those plastic chairs are no damn good for anything because they don't hold up at all. But you know what? No one drags those people out there to do it. The crowd loves it. I've got a hunch the bull probably gets a kick out of it, too.

There's something there for everybody. From the barrel racing to the junior steer riding and even to the mutton busting that goes on at the little town rodeo, it's truly an opportunity for people to connect with their animals and with other Albertans. I still believe that in this Assembly, where we often play on the differences that we may have here, one thing we can agree on is that it's a tried and traditional sport. The respect amongst the competitors is genuine. The care for the animals is absolutely paramount. As Albertans it doesn't hurt us occasionally to stand up and be a little different from the norm and say: those are all great sports, and there are many great athletes, but very few have the Calgary Stampede and the CFR in the same province.

I don't think it's a bad motion to support at all.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak on Motion 514 to urge the government to introduce legislation that will adopt rodeo as Alberta's official sport, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Now, I want to talk a little bit about how important sport was to me as a kid growing up. You know, I was born and raised in Calgary, and I lived in the northwest, a complete, total urbanite, never sat on a horse before and knew nothing about rodeo.

I grew up and lived and breathed hockey, and I was a huge Habs fan. The Montreal Canadiens was my team. I collected every hockey card. Every piece of memorabilia I collected I still have to this day, as a matter of fact. I knew every stat of every player on the team, every plus and minus, every penalty minute. My friends, you know, all collected the same things, too. And they would have posters on their bedroom walls. They would all be posters of Cheryl Ladd or Farrah Fawcett, Charlie's Angels, but I had posters of Yvan Cournoyer and Jean Béliveau and the Pocket Rocket, Henri Richard – I was a big fan – Réjean Houle, J.C. Tremblay, Jacques Lemaire, and Jacques Laperrière. These are all familiar names; I can see some people nodding their heads. Larry "Big Bird" Robinson – I was a big fan – Doug Risebrough, Bob Gainey, Yvon Lambert, Guy Lafleur: I knew them all. I can go on and on, but I won't, Mr. Speaker.

Then in 1980 the whole world changed for me.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Webber: Yes.

In that year, Mr. Speaker, the NHL franchise Atlanta Flames relocated to Calgary. On that day the Montreal Canadiens did not exist anymore. I was now a lifetime fan of the Calgary Flames, and I continue to be today. I severed all my ties with the Canadiens. I'm sorry. It was an ugly divorce, but my heart's with the Flames now. My point is, Mr. Speaker, that hockey was a very large part of my life, and growing up, I played all over the world: Communist Russia, Finland, U.S., throughout Canada. I played a lot of hockey. It was a big part of my friends' lives as well.

Rodeo had not been part of my life at all, not at all whatsoever, up until about a year and a half ago, when the Premier appointed me to serve on the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Board, which was a wonderful opportunity. I don't know why I was asked. I had no

experience with rodeo or with horses or anything, but from that time until now I've been exposed to a way of life and a sport which I only now realize is a big part of the Alberta western heritage, a big part of our history. It brought communities together. It continues to bring communities together.

I've attended over 30 rodeo competitions throughout Alberta: the CFR, the Calgary Stampede, the Ponoka Stampede, the Strathmore stampede. I've watched over 240 chuckwagon races in my year and a half as a board member. I recently attended the 2008 Canadian Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in Calgary, back on May 18. I've been really thrust into a sport that I never knew anything about before. It wasn't a part of my life in the past.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wear Wrangler jeans. That's all I buy. Yes, I've got four pairs of cowboy boots now. I wear them regularly wherever I go. I collect belt buckles, for God's sake. I'm an urban cowboy. John Travolta, watch out, I tell you. I've even learned how to ride a horse. I've taken lessons now, and I've been on a number of cattle drives, which I'm quite proud of.

You know, names such as Cody Cassidy from Donalda, Davey Shields, Jr. from Bashaw, Dustin Flundra from Pincher Creek, and Denton Edge from Marwayne, Scott Schiffner from Strathmore, Debbie Renger from Okotoks, Jill Bishop from Edmonton – I can go on, Mr. Speaker, but maybe I shouldn't go on. You know, all these names are now household names in my house, and we talk about it regularly in my home around the dinner table. I might exaggerate a bit.

Anyway, what I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that hockey is Canada's sport, and it will always be Canada's sport, but it does make sense to have rodeo as Alberta's official sport. So I do support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's Motion 514, and I encourage all members to do so as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have about eight minutes, and I have six speakers here. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As someone who came from the east to Alberta 30 years ago, who came for a year – obviously, you can see that I flunked math – 30 years later I want to say that rodeo is something I compliment the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, on. The reason I say that is that about a week and a half ago I attended the CFR, and I actually had the pleasure of buying my year and a half old son a cowboy hat. In doing so, it was really quite interesting.

The comments made tonight by many members here really captured the fact that there really are two laws. Even though we make laws in here, there are two laws in this world: one is the law of the farm, and the other is the law of the school. I know the hon. member is familiar with both. Really, the law of the farm is that you plant in the spring, you till, and you do work. There are no shortcuts. At the end you reap the harvest of the hard work you put into it. That is the law of the farm, and really there are no shortcuts, as opposed to the law of the school, where you can sign a multimillion dollar contract for an NHL hockey player, and guess what? You don't even have to produce.

One of the key spirits of this particular motion – and I don't say this in a political way – is that I believe it is a conservative principle that you have to work hard and produce to get results. That theory of what is being proposed, I think, is very important. The law of the school is something that we accept, but at the same time I believe we're held in better stead by the law of the farm.

I want to end with this. A few years ago the Calgary Stampede was in my city of Fort McMurray. We had a rodeo at the hockey arena, and the announcer announced that the mayor – I was mayor at the time – was going to be riding a bull. I wasn't aware of that situation at the time. I showed up, and I had met people just before outside saying: Guy, we paid 20 bucks to watch you ride a bull. Now, I was a little bit afraid of riding a bull because I had never ridden a bull. I was in the back, and there was a television crew that was following me, and I could see it. You know, did I want to be a coward or stupid or foolish? By the way, there was an election coming up, so I want to let you know where I was going with this.

I decided to ride the bull. I had never done it before. I got a little bit nervous, though. What I didn't know is that they wore bullet-proof vests underneath their cowboy shirts, or at least some folks did. I don't know if you knew that. I'm not sure how many hon. members in here have ridden a bull, but I'm very proud to say that I got on the bull. Actually, they had four clowns, with the exception of me on the bull – that's five, I guess – and there was a full crowd of about 5,000. I actually was getting nervous, and I was going to get off the bull, but my left leg – I never realized that with two and a half thousand pounds going against your leg, you really don't move your leg – was pressed against the gate. The actual clown went and said, "Oh, I can help you out, sir," as he proceeded to open the gate. Anyway, six and a half seconds later – and I actually have a finger to prove that if I can show you that finger today. This finger is what's left of my – that's the end finger, not a middle finger, for anyone who's thinking there. But I did it, and I want to let you know that my family was very proud of me. I'm sorry my son wasn't born then, but I wish he could have seen it. I hope that some day he will.

8:20

I want to say that I support the law of the farm. You work hard. You reap the benefits in the months of hard work in the agriculture sector that the minister of agriculture is aware of, and then you reap the benefit. I support it for that reason because it really is a positive spirit of working hard to get good results. If you don't produce, you don't reap the benefit of that. At rodeos, I want to say, everyone is there in the spirit of producing.

With that, I certainly, without any fear of contradiction, support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's Motion 514.

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

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Motion 514, and I want to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for having one good idea.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent a constituency that is both rural and urban: the city of Leduc is the home of the Black Gold Rodeo, the first rodeo in the CPRA calendar at the beginning of May every year; parts of Leduc and Camrose counties, where we have a lot of farms and ranches; and Rolly View, Alberta, in Leduc county, which was the home of Miss Rodeo Canada, Jenna Berreth, for 2008. Also, as a member of the black community I would be remiss if I didn't mention one of the greatest cowboys that this province has ever known, Mr. John Ware.

This is the west. This is how the west was won by men, and women as well, who worked the land and worked with the animals. For those in my constituency and elsewhere who might be concerned for the welfare of the animals, I want to join with many of the other speakers before me in talking about the great care and attention that is paid to the animals today in this sport, the value that is placed on

these animals, ranches like the Calgary Stampede Ranch, and the great job that they do. Also, Mr. Speaker, I attended the CFR in Edmonton this year, and I was very pleased to see that they've put in a rule, unnecessary roughness in tie-down roping, where the calf gets a break if he's handled too roughly and the cowboy is penalized.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that without a doubt I believe that recognizing rodeo as the official sport of this province recognizes our heritage, and it is the right thing to do. I would remind all of the hon. members here, when we think of this denigrating other sports: who knows that lacrosse is the official sport of this country? Does that take away from hockey or any other great sports here?

I encourage all hon. members to support Motion 514. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would love to tell you a great personal rodeo story, but to do that I would have to lie because I don't have any great personal rodeo stories, and I feel rather inadequate over here in this Chamber because all of you all of a sudden are cowboys and have great personal rodeo stories. Mr. Speaker, unlike you, my last name doesn't even lend itself to being a cowboy, so I find myself here at a disadvantage. What's really frustrating right now is that, following some articles that came out today in the *Edmonton Journal*, normally I'd be itching with one-liners over here and saying how the member can relate to rodeo because holding onto an opposition leader's seat is as difficult as holding onto a bull or something like that, but I won't do that.

What's going through my mind right now, Mr. Speaker, is that it's really that important – and I haven't received one phone call yet on making rodeo an official sport, so frankly I don't think there are many constituents in my riding that are vested in it one way or the other. What really makes me think, as I was listening to these fascinating stories, is: why are we here sitting in this Chamber, when there are so many other issues that could and should be discussed, discussing the importance or lack thereof of rodeo? Are those the things that we really should be here discussing? I think rodeo is a fabulous entertainment, be it sport. I've been to rodeos before. I think they're great. I'd never get on a bull, but that's, perhaps, the difference between me and the rest of you in this Chamber because apparently all of you have. I just wonder: is this something that we should be doing over here? I'll leave you with that thought. Just to end this debate and not to hear any more of your personal rodeo stories, I'd encourage everybody to vote in favour of it right now.

The Deputy Speaker: We have only 60 seconds left, so I would like to call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Listen, I really appreciated that. I have to say it's a nice change from yelling at each other, isn't it? [interjections] One of the people said: wait five minutes. That's right.

There were more comments and stories than I can respond to in the five minutes that I have here, but I'll just make a few comments. There was reference from the Member for Calgary-Egmont to the article by Valerie Fortney that I also noticed in the *Calgary Herald*. I notice that she didn't mention in there the quote by George Brookman, with the Calgary Stampede, saying that he thought it was a great idea.

I'll take a moment to respond to the comments from the Member for Highwood, the minister for agriculture. I thought his comments were good points to direct at me. The first had to do with farm

safety, and there's no question that there are safety issues for the cowboys around rodeo. I've seen more than a few of them carried off the dirt. In my view, what we're arguing for in farm safety and for farm workers is the right of farm workers to enjoy the same benefits that all other workers have. Whether they're working in a feedlot or elsewhere, they're in many cases essentially industrial kinds of workers. Our position is that those kinds of workers deserve the same protections and rights that other workers have. So I think there's a difference there.

On the horse-racing issue, I actually enjoy horse racing. I go to the races from time to time. What troubles me, as all of you will know, is that we channel about \$50 million a year, about a million dollars a week, into supporting horse racing. I just have an awful lot of trouble with that when we signed up a couple of years ago for a 10-year deal, \$500 million to support horse racing. That's my issue. I don't take issue with the races. I know attendance is declining, but the racing itself is great. It's great fun. It's just that the public funds that go toward it are quite staggering.

I appreciated very much the comments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. He's clearly experienced, direct experience, far more than I. He and a number of other people touched on the values that are around rodeo, the notion that you only get results if you put in the effort. One of the things that I didn't mention – and I hardly have time to – is the tremendous sense of community, as well, in rodeo. Cowboys come together if they're hurt. They look after each other. There are the benevolent funds. There are a lot of very admirable values that are cultivated, if I can say that, through rodeo.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and others also mentioned animal welfare. Believe me, I've heard in the last couple of weeks from more than a few animal welfare people, but I also feel very confident that the rodeo industry looks after their animals very carefully. Anybody who has followed rodeo for any length of time can see how standards for animal welfare have risen. As I think I said, maybe in the opening, some of the best cared for animals anywhere are rodeo stock.

8:30

I hope that addresses some of the issues that were raised, Mr. Speaker. Albertans from across the province carry a deep connection to this province's land and to our culture. I would invite all members to vote in favour of this. I understand that there are other sports contending with this, but frankly I don't think any are quite the equivalent of rodeo. Alberta consistently hosts the two largest rodeos in the country, the Calgary Stampede and the Canadian Finals. While things like the Grey Cup and the Stanley Cup occasionally come through Alberta, every single year the greatest rodeos in the country and the greatest cowboys and the greatest rodeo stock reside right here. I think they deserve to be recognized as Alberta's official sport.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 40
Child, Youth and Family Enhancement
Amendment Act, 2008

[Debate adjourned November 20: Ms Notley speaking]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2008. If we look at this bill, it significantly improves the former bill in that it's doing quite a bit more to allow courts, caseworkers, and the like to look more closely into and look after children who are, no doubt, in some sort of peril. You know, we've heard many times in the House that we do things in the best interests of the child, and in many cases it appears that this bill is going a long way to trying to live up to that promise.

If you take a look at the bill, it does some interesting and rather good things. A couple of those go directly to giving the courts authority to order child support for a child under the director's care. In fact, if you do have some parents out there with the means, although that child is not residing with those parents, those parents are still under a duty and an obligation. Although they're having a difficult time with the care of the child, at least from the standpoint of managing it, they're still financially obligated to contribute to that child's welfare and well-being. I think that's a very good thing. It makes people responsible for their actions or their inability to I guess manage their lives or manage their children accordingly and will allow for them to at least contribute financially to their well-being. I think that's a good thing.

It also clarifies numerous things, like the amount of time a child spends in the director's care. It expands the field of candidates for applications to be private guardians. Another good thing is that many times individuals who find themselves in the thralls of a situation like this are looking for good guardians, de facto parents to help them get along in a life that has no doubt been difficult and somewhat more trying for them than it is for most Alberta children.

It also addresses confidential issues regarding the Child and Youth Advocate and FOIP requests. You know, I think that addressing the confidentiality is very important for these children who are involved in these cases, and it's something that should be given the utmost precedence.

Looking at it overall, it's a very good amendment to the bill. I think it will serve the best interests of the child involved in these cases and will go to improve those situations.

The one sticking point that sort of remains – and it has been brought up by other members of, I guess, at least the opposition side and I don't think has been clarified, or maybe it has and I just missed that portion – is that it removes the former matter where a director had to file a plan of care for a child within 42 days of an application for an initial custody order. I guess this sort of moves it to the area of: well, trust us; we'll get it done. There is some concern with that provision in that we know that a director or someone else can often get busy, and the next thing you know, the best intention of the director may go by the wayside, and sometimes things won't get done in a timely manner. I guess our position is that we think that some time limit should be placed upon when reporting mechanisms are in place. They're there for a reason. I think it keeps us honest. It keeps the system honest and keeps the system chugging along.

We all know that people oftentimes are frustrated with the time and speed it takes to get things done. If there isn't a timeline protection placed in there, then I think we're running into increasing people's frustration in increasing possibly what's in the best interest of the child.

Other than that, you know, it seems like some good amendments have been made, and I'm supportive of the changes that have been made. Hopefully it'll work better for children who are involved in this no doubt difficult time in their lives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 40, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act. There are some very good things in this bill. I know that, as my colleague has said, we hear from the other side of the House from the minister that children are her main concern, and I have no reason to doubt that at all.

This is a very, very complex problem in our society. It probably isn't going to ever go away. We always will have children that are going to require care. But I learned many, many years ago in Winnipeg when I was friends with some native people that one of the things that was so important was that even if the mom was a bad, bad mom, the kids wanted to be with their mom. Part of what child, youth, and family enhancement is trying to do is to make sure that the least – it's a fallback that the child is actually taken away. They would try very hard to be able to assist the family in being able to keep the children. They often just need some kinds of support in terms of parenting skills. Many of them, especially the younger ones, have children and probably weren't really well parented themselves, so they have no role models to follow. I think it's very important that this bill will help do that.

8:40

One thing that I have a concern with, though, as my colleague has mentioned, is the time frame. I'm a big believer in a time frame. Part of that is based on my experience as a health care professional, when I realized how much work we had to do in such a short space of time. It would have been easy to say: okay, well, maybe I'll let the next shift do it. But that doesn't work. You have to do what your responsibilities are at the time. Because there was a time frame, we went in, and I knew how many hours, and I knew what I had to do, and there was always a little bit of time for any emergencies that would have come up that would have distracted me from the schedule that I had set for myself.

I'm really concerned that there isn't a time frame for the hearings that have to happen. I realize that particularly in the social justice and in the social side of things we're all understaffed and everyone is working flat out. That's when mistakes get made, and that's when things get put aside. So I am concerned about that part of the bill.

Another thing that I think is important is that there is a mechanism that we can get either the mother or the father, if they are capable, to actually give some support money. I've had some experience with kids that have problems and worked with those that are in care or in homes. For some reason – and it's probably because of our materialistic society – those kids seem to be really proud when they say: my dad gave some money to help me. They seem to equate money with love or at least someone that cares. That is a very sad statement, that that's what our society has come to. But the fact that it does exist I think is good, when we can at least get parents to be able to support their kids in some way. The kids then understand that they haven't been totally forgotten. I think that for the moment that's pretty much all I have to say on this.

One of the other changes to the confidentiality probably is in the best interest of the youth as it allows a foundation of trust to be established. One of the absolute first things that has to happen when you're working with a child that's been taken away from its family is you have to establish trust. These kids that are moved around trust no one. They only trust themselves. Their street survival skills become very apparent after a very short period of time. The fact that you can keep the confidentiality is the first step towards really establishing trust, and it does open the doors to be able to talk to these kids and let these kids express their fears or whatever.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and speak to Bill 40. I think that there are a number of things about this bill that I'd like to talk about. I'll start with what I think is good in the bill; that is, placing a cultural context around children who may require to be apprehended so that when a petition for an adoption order, an application for private guardianship is made regarding an aboriginal child, a cultural connection plan is also made. This plan will outline how the child's connection with their aboriginal heritage and culture will be nurtured and maintained.

I think this is a very progressive change, Mr. Speaker. We heard from officials from the department at the Public Accounts meeting last week. The deputy minister, I think, spoke very well about the different attitudes that exist with aboriginal communities with respect to adoption, which is not something that they readily accept. Private guardianship and being raised by someone among their kin is considered much more appropriate in those communities. I think that this bill does allow that, and I think that is a very good step forward.

There are a number of things that I'd like to just mention which I don't think are positive. The one I'll start with is the appeal panel. In the current act the appeal panel can overturn the director's decisions regarding the removal of a child from a residential facility and all licensing decisions. Right now it's made up of lay members, and it's inappropriate, they say, to overturn their decisions.

The bill would prohibit the appeal panel from hearing appeals regarding an initial application for a licence for a residential facility and the placement of conditions in an initial licence. It would restrict the powers of the panel with regard to placement or removal of a child from a residential facility or foster home and all other decisions regarding licensing. In these cases the panel can only confirm the director's decision or send the matter back to the ministry for reconsideration. Once a decision is referred back to the director and the director reconsiders it, the director's updated decision cannot be appealed to the appeal panel.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, they've really eliminated a meaningful appeal of decisions by directors. They can send it back, but once the director has confirmed the decision, perhaps using different reasons or rationale, they can no longer challenge that decision. It reminds me of the Senate of Canada. This is the kind of decision . . . [interjection] I know that the hon. minister of renewable resources will be shocked and appalled to learn that his government is proposing legislation that will mimic the Canadian Senate in its current form. In other words, you can stall the decision, you can send it back once, but you can't overturn it, so ultimately it's no appeal at all. I think this is a very retrograde step with respect to this.

The second thing is that the ministry has claimed there have been problems with the interpretation of the provision regarding plans of care. If the legislation was intended to require that the director start a plan of care within 42 days but the courts misinterpreted the legislation, then why not simply clarify the wording? Mr. Speaker, it would be even better, however, to name a reasonable deadline for completing these plans of care so that children involved don't stay in limbo any longer than they have to. By removing all provisions regarding plans of care, the ministry is weakening its commitment to getting these plans done at all, never mind just on a timely basis.

I want to talk about the issues regarding confidentiality between the advocate and the children. These are issues the ministry is trying to address. It's important that a child's every remark to the advocate

cannot be accessed by lawyers or family members. The problem here is that the proposed amendment has the potential to limit more access to information than the ministry says it will. The change would make information given in confidence to the advocate by the child privileged information along with any related documents. Privileged information is a specific category of information under the FOIP Act, which is tightly restricted. FOIP says that the head of a public body must refuse to disclose the information under an access to information request.

8:50

Although the proposed amendment in question would still require the advocate to report to the minister any information a child shares with him that alleges abuse or neglect, this privileged information may henceforth be excluded from quarterly reports. The quarterly report is what we recently released, and it contained specific examples of cases of alleged abuse or neglect although the identifying details were blacked out due to provisions already under the freedom of information legislation. However, if this information becomes privileged, then these examples may not be included in the quarterlies at all or may be censored if the quarterlies are subject to freedom of information if the allegations were communicated to the advocate from a child directly. Consequently, the public may be able to access even less information about what has happened in the child welfare system than before.

Mr. Speaker, this fits very well with a pattern that's emerging with this government, that they would rather hide problems than fix them, keep them from public view, and it's not just in this ministry. This legislation in this respect seems to us to just head off the kind of very positive result that came as a result of the release of those quarterly reports, which I just want to remind the House contained no information that would identify any child or any family but merely highlighted the fact that serious problems were not being addressed over a sustained period of time by the ministry. That embarrasses the government, but it does no harm to children or their families. In fact, it helps them by forcing the government to change how it deals with these issues.

Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to trust the advocate's reporting mechanisms in any event and his accountability in general when the position is still under the supervision of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Thus, one of the biggest weaknesses of the bill can be found in what it omits. By not making the advocate an officer of the Legislature, the bill fails to remedy the lack of transparency surrounding the position. The public's trust in the effectiveness of the advocate has already been questioned by the late filing of watered-down annual reports. How can we even trust that legislation regarding the advocate will be followed?

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act says the advocate "shall hold office for a term not exceeding 5 years," yet our current advocate has far exceeded this term. The Child and Youth Advocate needs to report directly to the Legislature to ensure full accountability to the child welfare system. Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear that the child advocate presently forms a part of the minister's staff, essentially, and is subject to the direction of the minister. If the minister is not interested in resolving problems or making sure that their important issues are brought out to the public, then neither will the child advocate. The child advocate is not independent and cannot stand up for children in this province if, in fact, he is going to run afoul of his boss.

Those are the main issues that I see with respect to this bill, Mr. Speaker. It has one positive aspect; that is, the cultural sensitivity, the recognition that aboriginal children need to have a plan that keeps them within their community and within their culture. I think

that's great. I think the rest of it, overall, is a bit of a retrograde step. I'm disappointed that we have not made more progress with regard to making sure that children in care are not just hidden and that issues related to their care in government are not brought out in greater relief, rather the opposite. I don't think that on balance I can support this bill and will be voting against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

There are five minutes for comments or questions. Is there anybody who wishes to join in that before I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 41

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to introduce Bill 41, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008 (No.2), for third reading.

I do want to very much compliment members opposite for their input and also for their support. I believe it's a very important bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've hashed out this bill to some extent. I appreciated the other day a good exchange with the minister in clarifying some of the matters. I don't have much to add here. I don't think we need to prolong the discussion. As far as I know, our caucus will be supporting these amendments to the Municipal Government Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to indicate that this bill, which will expand the permitted uses for surplus school sites and the creation of community services reserve lands, will allow municipalities and school authorities to develop libraries, police stations, nonprofit child care, and so on on this land and will also allow the creation of more affordable housing projects. The approach to this has been, at least in the city of Edmonton, somewhat controversial, but on balance I think this broadens the available uses for surplus school sites, gives the municipalities some more flexibility and, I think, is a positive change. I commend the minister for this bill. I'll be supporting it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other member who wishes to speak on the bill, I would ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to close the debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just the question, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

Bill 47

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

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

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise in support of third reading of Bill 47, the Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008.

As we've already heard, amendments proposed in this act will expand the ability of government to respond to rapidly changing circumstances in the energy sector. The circumstances in the energy sector have always been difficult to predict, with highly volatile commodity prices, changing global supply and demand, changing public expectations, and so on and so forth. Just this month the International Energy Agency released its World Energy Outlook, a highly regarded report outlining the future from an energy perspective. In their report the IEA writes:

Oil is the world's vital source of energy and will remain so for many years to come . . . But the sources of oil to meet rising demand, the cost of producing it and the prices that consumers will need to pay for it are extremely uncertain, perhaps more than ever.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, the report goes on to say that decisive policy action is required to meet the challenge of providing secure and affordable energy that is also environmentally acceptable. The amendments proposed in Bill 47 respond to precisely that, giving the government of Alberta the flexibility and authority to act decisively as the global energy market continues to evolve. This flexibility is needed so that we can maintain Alberta's competitive position and maximize positive results for Albertans.

An effective royalty regime is only one of the ways Alberta benefits from energy development in our province. Economic activity, jobs, and tax revenue generated from the energy sector are also important and are part of the broader considerations government has taken into account.

Finally, the act gives cabinet the authority to pass regulations to strengthen the accountability systems necessary to ensure complete and timely reporting on royalties owed to the province. This responds to recommendations made by the Auditor General and by Peter Valentine in his report Building Confidence: Improving Accountability and Transparency in Alberta's Royalty System.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would categorize this act overall as responsive to changing circumstances, and I urge all members to give their full support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we're going to fall rather short of all members giving this bill full support. I hate to disappoint members opposite, but I think we have to look at this bill in the context of the royalty framework agreement that the government has arrived at, which in our view is a complete sellout of the interests of the people of Alberta, who own these resources. It falls far short of royalties that are payable in other, similar jurisdictions, including right here in North America.

I've spoken about that at some length, but I do want to speak a bit about bitumen. The current act allows for oil in kind for payment of royalties, and this extends it to bitumen. The minister, I think, perhaps the Premier, has just talked about taking bitumen in kind so that there would be some bitumen left here in the province to upgrade locally. Now, I want to talk a little bit about what the background is for that because we've seen now five major upgrader

projects be postponed, shelved, or maybe permanently cancelled. We're already beginning to see unemployment among building trades workers in this province.

At the same time the pipelines to carry bitumen to 6upgraders in the United States are going ahead full steam. There are two major pipelines currently under construction, Keystone and the Alberta Clipper, which is aptly named because I think it's going to make sure that we're clipped pretty well when it comes to bitumen, that have the capacity to carry the entire production of bitumen in this province currently to the United States. These are massive pipelines. But, Mr. Speaker, it's worse than that. There are a number of other major pipelines that are either now being brought forward for approval or that are on the drawing board such that it creates a set of tentacles like an octopus which has the capacity to suck this province dry.

There are 16 major facilities currently in the United States that are being upgraded or constructed to handle Alberta bitumen at the same time as similar projects in Alberta are being shut down. So the policy of the government is to export virtually all the bitumen and the bitumen that is going to be produced in this province to the United States for upgrading there, thereby transferring good jobs, and thousands and thousands of them, to the United States at the expense of Alberta workers.

Now, the government has been able to get away with this to a degree because of the overheated economy and because people in Alberta have been able to find work relatively easily. That situation is now changing, and this is going to become, I think, a very serious issue for the people of Alberta, specifically those that have lost their jobs because of the downturn in the economy and the drop in oil prices. They're going to look at what this government is doing, that this government is building and allowing to be built massive pipelines to export unprocessed bitumen, unprocessed raw materials from this province, and the value-added jobs are going to be created in the United States. That's a clear strategy. If you look at a map of these pipelines, you'll see an intertwined network that is going to suck Alberta dry.

This will be, in my view, increasingly apparent to the people of Alberta, and we will do our best to help shine some light on what this government is actually attempting to do because this is perhaps the greatest sellout of Alberta in its entire history. Our view is very clear: if you mine it here, you refine it here. But the government, notwithstanding promises made by the Premier during his leadership race, has gone in exactly the opposite direction. Despite our urging, this government did not intervene at the National Energy Board hearings for either the Alberta Clipper or the Keystone pipeline, and I expect that they won't intervene when other, similar projects are brought forward for approval at the National Energy Board.

So this government is facilitating the transfer of wealth, the transfer of jobs to the United States, and they are trying to mask this and hide it from the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I don't think the people of Alberta in the long run are going to let them get away with it. I think it's a shameful policy, and the government has not only failed to keep its promise, but it has let Albertans down time and time again with some of the lowest royalties in the world and the export of our raw materials for processing in another country, if indeed some members of this government actually believe that it's another country. I certainly do.

Mr. Speaker, I think the bill should be defeated. I think the government should go to the people in an election and tell them exactly what they're doing and see if the people of Alberta actually think that they should be re-elected based on what this means in the long run for the next generations of Albertans, who are going to be left to be hewers of wood, drawers of water, and miners of bitumen,

and that's all. When the vast majority of the value-added is transferred with the willingness and complete concurrence of this government, they don't deserve to be the government of this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a third time]

9:10

Bill 48

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2008

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 48, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2008.

I appreciate my colleagues' support of this bill. Very briefly to recap, this act legislates Alberta's new scientific research and development credit as announced in our budget of 2008. In addition, it includes measures to ensure that employment income and active small-business income are ultimately taxed at the same rate. Finally, the act implements technical and administrative changes to keep the tax laws consistent for federal and provincial purposes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again with a new tax credit for corporations. This is called the scientific research and development credit for businesses. In our view, this bill gives corporations a tax break and a tax credit. At the same time, it's increasing the tax rate of small corporations whose income falls between \$400,000 and \$500,000 so they're taxed at the same rate as other businesses. Tax breaks to businesses are part of the federal and provincial Conservatives' reductions for big business. We don't believe that corporate tax breaks are a social benefit. Alberta currently has the lowest general tax rate for corporations in Canada.

Of course, as we face the potential of a deficit, we need to recall that the government has depended far more than other governments in the country on royalties for program spending. We spend a much higher proportion of nontax income on program spending than any other province. As those royalties get squeezed, then we are going to be faced with a serious problem, which has already been identified. The question then becomes: is this government, like its federal cousins, willing to entertain deficits? My view is that there's going to have to be some legislation change if that was to be the case because deficits are illegal, and we wouldn't want to see the hon. finance minister go to jail because she ran a deficit.

That leaves us in the position where we will then be revisiting the history of the 1990s in this province with massive cuts to program spending. That may lead to cuts to our health care system again. Of course, if the government continues with the privatization of health care, the costs will undoubtedly increase. Cuts to education, cuts to other important programs: that's where we're headed, Mr. Speaker.

The government knows and I think the hon. members who have been reading the reports that have been coming out and listening carefully know that continued tax breaks for corporations, some of the lowest royalties in the world, the lowest corporate taxes in Canada, and a big squeeze on royalty income and on the income tax income with the coming recession mean that this ship is headed

straight for an iceberg. I just wish that the people on the bridge would hear the alarm because I think we're going to be in some difficulty, and there are just not enough lifeboats. I know it sounds like a great movie, but it could potentially be a real tragedy, Mr. Speaker.

We will be opposing this bill.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Mr. Speaker, we've hashed this bill out. We've got our comments on record concerning this particular piece of legislation, so I don't think we need to prolong the debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a third time]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've made some good progress this evening. We've had a number of bills dealt with and passed a motion. On that note, I think perhaps we should adjourn for the evening and reconvene at 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:17 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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