



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 1, 2008

Issue 55a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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

Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC),
Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Solicitor General and Public Security
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education
and Technology
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L),
Official Opposition House Leader
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L),
Official Opposition Whip
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),
Minister of Municipal Affairs
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Minister of Education, Government House Leader
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),
Minister of Infrastructure
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Energy
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Lukaszk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L)
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Leader of the Official Opposition
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean
Clerk Assistant/ Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	J. Ed Richard
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	William C. Semple
		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 1, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, today in the Chamber media gallery we have 40 gentlemen from the Foothills male choir from Hinton. They will lead us today in the singing of our national anthem. These gentlemen performed in the Legislature rotunda over the lunch hour. They will be singing a bilingual version of our national anthem, and I would invite all in the Assembly 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. [applause]

The Speaker: Please be seated. We could go on with 20 minutes of Christmas carols, but I think the business of the day probably takes precedence.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the ambassador of the United States, His Excellency David Wilkins. The ambassador is accompanied by Consul General Tom Huffaker and Ms Kim Klassen from the consulate general in Calgary. This is not the ambassador's first official visit to our province, but it is likely that this will be His Excellency's final visit as ambassador of the United States. Ambassador Wilkins has been a great supporter of Alberta over the past three years. Ambassador Wilkins has helped raise Alberta's profile, and in particular he has helped to inform key U.S. decision-makers about our role as a safe, secure, growing, and friendly energy supplier.

Today we regretfully bid farewell to Ambassador Wilkins as he'll soon leave his post and return home to South Carolina, where he previously served as Speaker of the Legislature. Thankfully, we can look forward to continuing our strong relationship with Ambassador Wilkins in his new role, amongst others, as a member of the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance senior advisory board. Mr. Speaker, Alberta greatly values its relationship with the United States as our number one trading partner, neighbour, and ally. We thank Ambassador Wilkins for his diligence in seeking to understand and communicate about Alberta to his countrymen. I would like our honoured guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and the thanks of this Assembly. [applause]

The Speaker: I'd like all Members of the Legislative Assembly to know as well that His Excellency has been a wonderful friend of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. Your Excellency, all the best.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 21 guests from Ft. Sask Christian school: 18 students accompanied by teacher Mrs. Tara Comeau, educational assistant Mrs. Niki Blanchard, and, of course, parent helper Zhaohui Chen. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. Firstly, on your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you 17 students from the Eleanor Hall school, which is located in Clyde. They are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Dana Zadunayski, parent helper and bus driver Sue Ringuette. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, thank you again. It is truly an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of seven individuals from the Council of Alberta University Students who I've had the great pleasure of working with this year. I'm meeting with them a little bit later on this afternoon. This is a passionate group of individuals who care deeply about our postsecondary system. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. They are Beverly Eastham, CAUS chair and U of A Students' Union VP external; Jenn Prosser, CAUS vice-chair and University of Lethbridge Students' Union vice-president academic; Janelle Morin, University of Alberta Students' Union president; Dalmy Baez, University of Calgary Students' Union president; Alastair MacKinnon, University of Calgary Students' Union VP external; Adam Vossepoel, University of Lethbridge Students' Union president; and Duncan Wojtaszek, CAUS executive director. I would like them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House eight students from The King's University College. They are Heather Van Haren, Angelina Stark, Veronica Bouwman, Jonathan Punnoose, Kamalpreet Singh, Sherisse Girard, Stacey Vos, and Leanna Risk. Now, they're here because Heather Van Haren is my niece, and she's brought them down here to visit with us. Heather, I want to note, was one of my strongest volunteers in the last election. They're in the public gallery, and I would like them to stand and receive the warmest welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have two introductions today. It's a great pleasure, first, to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of individuals representing the Alberta spinal cord injury initiative. This initiative is a partnership between the government of Alberta, the Rick Hansen foundation, and the spinal cord injury stakeholders. I had the pleasure of meeting with them earlier to learn about the many great accomplishments of the spinal cord initiative. Seated in the members' gallery this afternoon are representatives of this initiative: Mr. Vance Milligan, chair of the Alberta spinal cord injury initiative leadership team and chair of the Alberta Paraplegic Foundation; Mr. Eric Boyd, CEO, Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Network; Ms Teren Clarke, executive director, Canadian Paraplegic Association; Mr. Colin Ewart, director of government relations of the Rick Hansen foundation. Also joining them today are Mr. Marlin Styner, chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; Ms Diane Gramlich, Marlin's wife and very competent assistant; and Mr. Robb Stoddard, VP public affairs, Hill & Knowlton. I would ask them to stand or give a wave and receive the very warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege and a real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Foothills male choir. This choir is led by conductor Bob Udell and is as diverse as the riding I represent. They're made up of coal miners, foresters, teachers, doctors, oil and gas men, and clergy. The choir was good enough to sing for us in the rotunda earlier today, and they are here with a number of their spouses and friends, sort of their groupies that follow them around the country as they sing. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, for my second introduction I'd like to introduce a lady from my constituency, Shirley Waddell. Shirley is joined by her first cousin Judy Groeneveld, who just happens to be the wife of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. They're here to enjoy some of the proceedings of the House today, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. First, I'd like to introduce my constituency assistant, Joan Witty. This is her first visit to this House. We all know that these front-line workers serve the people in our local constituency offices every day. I would like to ask Joan to rise and receive the marvellous traditional warm welcome of this House.

My second introduction is a group of special citizens. They happen to live in the most southwestern part of the city of Edmonton, which is called Edmonton-McClung. Today they're here to witness my presentation of the largest petition in this House, so I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions for today. For my first introduction it is my distinct pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Consul General Ruth Morales Prado of the Republic of

the Philippines. Her consulate's responsibilities are the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Yukon. Consul General Prado can speak German, Spanish, and French. She is a fighter, a survivor, and has been cancer free for the last 10 months. She was hosted for lunch today by our Minister of Employment and Immigration, and they were able to discuss matters pertaining to Filipino foreign workers and the memorandum of agreement between Alberta and the Philippines. This matter relates to helping sustain the economic development of our beloved province and to meeting the workforce needs in our health care system. Consul General Ruth Prado is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three special guests from Edmonton and two from Vancouver. Seated in the members' gallery are Honorary Consul General Esmeralda Agbulos of Edmonton and her beloved husband, Mr. Virgilio Agbulos. With them are Mr. Angel Magno Prado Jr. of Vancouver and Ms Lorna Marasigan of the Philippine consulate office in Vancouver. Accompanying these special people, my first time to introduce her to this House, is my beautiful wife and the mother of my three children, Mrs. Estrella Sayson Benito. I would like to ask these wonderful people to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Schad Richea, who is the head athletic therapist at the University of Calgary. Schad is here today as we had set up some meetings with some officials of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Schad has a bachelor of kinesiology from the University of Waterloo and is currently taking his master's of education at Washington University. Schad worked six years with the Toronto Blue Jays and has recently worked as the head athletic therapist for the University of Calgary Dinos football club, who won the CIS Canada west crown this year, only to lose in the Uteck Bowl a couple of weeks ago. He also worked with the Calgary Vipers as their athletic therapist, working with students and giving them an opportunity. I would like Schad to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Debra Jakubec. Debra is the executive director of HIV Edmonton. She has come down today at my invitation to help us mark World AIDS Day, which, of course, is today. I would ask Debra to please rise and accept the warm welcome and thanks from the Assembly for the work that she does and that her organization does.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Christopher Thomson. He's the senior trade adviser of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Denmark, the Royal Danish consulate. Dr. Thomson is in Alberta surveying this province's

supports for persons with spinal cord injuries. We are pleased that he's here with us today, and I know that he will be able to report many positive things to the Danish government. I'd ask Dr. Thomson to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. We in this House recognize and appreciate the importance of our families in helping us to perform our jobs, and I will introduce one such person, Dr. Jeanette Boman, the spouse of our leader, Kevin Taft. She gave up her position at the University of Alberta, where she was a professor in the Faculty of Nursing, in order to support Kevin. Along the way she also became the de facto den mother for our caucus in the Liberal Party. We understand the sacrifice and deeply appreciate the many long hours that she has donated over these past years. I would ask that she rise and would ask you to join me in giving her the welcome and recognition of this House.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of Kieran Leblanc, who was the heart, soul, and CEO of the Liberal Party. I don't have to tell anyone in this House what that means in terms of the personal sacrifice in one's personal life and the very, very long hours included. Regardless of which side of the House or from which party we are, I know that we all respect and owe so much to our dedicated staff. I would ask that Kieran rise and that we extend the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you violated the same rule that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona did a week ago. She has recanted.

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Restructuring

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The plan released today by the health minister makes clear why Capital health officials were cleaned out of the health care system and replaced by health entrepreneurs from Calgary. For years the Calgary health region ran over budget, was rife with conflicts of interest, and staggered under controversy, and now this minister wants the entire province to face the same problems. Does the Minister of Health and Wellness understand that his plan will bring the Calgary model, with all its budget overruns, conflicts of interest, and privatization, to the entire province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm not sure what was supposed to be the question there, but if it has the same sort of credibility that last week's questions had, Mr. Speaker, around potential conflict of interest, that was quickly put to rest on the weekend with a phone call by the mayor to a certain media outlet in the city.

Dr. Taft: This minister – and I hope everybody here is listening to this – is moving this province to a health care system where hospitals are unbundled and replaced with a string of for-profit clinics. This is a disaster in the making. Cost control will be impossible. The easiest, most profitable cases will be cherry-picked for profit while everyone else is left in line. To the Premier: will the Premier at least get an objective second opinion before allowing the health minister to shatter Alberta's health care system?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the last campaign I clearly articulated to all Albertans that we're going to make our health system sustainable, but that's within a publicly funded delivery system. We're not moving away from the commitment we made during the election.

Dr. Taft: Well, the plan released by the health minister today speaks of delivering more services through short-stay, nonhospital facilities, which is bureaucratic-speak for proliferation of investor-driven, for-profit clinics, like HRC and the always controversial Holy Cross eye centre in Calgary. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does this minister see any limits to the kind of health services that for-profit clinics could provide on contract to Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what document the Leader of the Opposition is reading from, but it's not the same one I released this morning.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta health system includes 104 hospitals. More than half of the hospitals in Alberta with fewer than 20 beds have occupancy rates below 75 per cent. Almost 20 per cent of those have occupancy rates below 50 per cent. My first question is to the Premier. How many of the 104 hospitals in Alberta have 20 or less beds?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hospital that I'm very familiar with, the Lamont health centre, has 10 acute-care beds. They also have 90 long-term care beds, 18 assisted living beds, and by the way those 18 were built by the United Church, the board that owns the facility. I'm familiar with that one. I would say that Vegreville has, I believe, 20 beds. Two Hills has 10. In the other beds in the hospital we have what we call a geriatric empowerment unit for seniors that might have had falls or some strokes. Through telehealth we don't have to move them out that great distance to Edmonton. We can treat them right in their own community.

Mr. MacDonald: Small hospitals in rural areas are not a laughing matter, hon. members across the way. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: which small hospitals in rural areas that provide low levels of complex care is this government planning on closing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, you know, nobody was laughing at any hospital facility, but that's the kind of abuse this member always uses in the House. Unfortunately, the cameras do capture the members here in the House.

Every hospital is important in the province of Alberta. They all deliver various programs. We have, you know, some eye surgery going on in the smaller facilities. We have moved other surgeries very focused in facilities throughout the province of Alberta. We're working with the doctors and the nurses to make sure that we deliver equitable services in every corner of the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why is the government closing rural hospitals when forecasts – your own forecasts – show that over the next 12 years demand for hospital beds in Alberta will increase by 32 per cent?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, Mr. Speaker, again kind of a fear factor here on behalf of the opposition. You know, they'll continue to drive this and drive this and drive this. We know that the issue of health care sustainability is a major issue right across Canada. Today we are fortunate in the province of Alberta because our pie was growing in terms of our oil revenue and other revenues to the province, so we could sustain the health care system. But when you talk to other Premiers in the country of Canada, close to 50 per cent of their budget is spent in one area only, and that is health. It gets close to those, you know, amounts where it's unsustainable. That's why we're working together with other provinces and the medical profession to ensure good service in the province of Alberta.

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

Oil Sands Development Downturn

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not long ago this government was touting oil sands development as the future of the province. That's looking pretty barren these days. Project after project after project in Fort McMurray and Peace River and the Industrial Heartland is being cancelled or postponed. All across the province we're seeing a drastic scaling back of Alberta's economic future. To the Premier: does the Premier accept that his government needs to change its economic policies immediately to address this collapse?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's quite a number of months after the election. They were during the election talking about how they're going to either close down the oil sands or bring some sort of moratorium. Well, the market has now brought around a moratorium. Now he's trying to balance what he was trying to do in March in terms of putting a moratorium that sent signals to other investors around the world.

Dr. Taft: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, you can do points of order all you want.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the pinch is on and the whole economy of Canada rests on the shoulders of Albertans, this guy all of a sudden has sort of a bright light come on in his head today.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this government mocked calls to plan development – no moratorium from us – of the oil sands and bitumen industry and, frankly, just a few weeks ago in this Assembly compared planning to Soviet-style communism. Well, he's right. The market has spoken, and it's not good. Will the Premier accept that this government's approach of leaving everything up to the market has contributed to this collapse in development? Every single plan is shelved.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again misinformation. Here's the situation. One, we had very high labour costs, very high construction costs, and with oil prices declining as they are, you cannot build upgraders at costs that are two to three times what the estimates were. Secondly, most importantly, we need a very clear carbon policy in this country, in fact, on the North American continent. Given what's happened over the last few days in Canada, it looks like it's going to take much longer for us to get to that position where investors around the world can feel comfortable investing billions of dollars in this country of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Costs got out of control because there was no plan. That was the whole point. Now signs of the slowdown are already hitting Alberta. Today there are over 500 homes listed for sale in Fort McMurray. Last year there were a dozen. Layoffs are beginning. Building permits and real estate prices are nosediving. To the Premier: does this government accept that a recession is soon likely in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, before this gentleman retires, maybe he could inform Albertans what his plan was in terms of putting a moratorium or even shutting down the oil sands. I wonder how many homes would have been up for sale and how many thousands of people would have lost their jobs, those thousands that would have to travel back to the Maritimes or to other provinces.

I continue to say that the engine of Canada's economy is still Alberta. That's why we have to work with the federal government, work together rather than driving these wedges. That's all this hon. member knows to do: wedge upon wedge upon wedge.

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

Congenital Syphilis Outbreak

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Tory government's failure to act on behalf of Albertans has resulted in a syphilis epidemic usually only seen in developing countries. Five babies have died because they contracted congenital syphilis. The health minister has failed to come clean about the reasons for this, and those who can uncover the truth have been gagged. My question is to the Premier: will you initiate a public inquiry so that Albertans can finally get the truth?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has a plan in place, and he can articulate that to the whole Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been very clear right from the outset that there have been a number of issues that government has undertaken relative to a public awareness campaign. Now, this particular member confuses a widespread advertising campaign with a public awareness campaign. There's been a significant amount of effort placed into a public awareness campaign.

But I do want to make sure that the member understands one thing. He keeps referring to this firing of four doctors. Well, first of all, I've explained the fact . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Premier because we know where this minister is getting his marching orders from, and that's this Premier. Albertans are suffering because a secretive health minister is covering up government failures. This government has become the most secretive in Canada. Again to the Premier: why won't you do the right thing and initiate an inquiry to uncover the truth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, I guess that his role is to, you know, criticize and bring about misinformation.

The minister articulated a plan last week. Again I'll ask him to repeat what he has planned for dealing with the outbreak.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my opening answer, and that is that the member continues to refer to the four doctors. Well,

I'd like to inform the House that it can't be all bad because one of the four doctors is now working for the government of Alberta on a contract in public health.

Mr. Mason: Whoop-de-do, Mr. Speaker.

Information about the government's response to the syphilis epidemic has been suppressed. Our freedom of information requests have come back censored beyond belief. Gagging public health officials, blacking out e-mails, and cancelling a public awareness campaign is not only secretive, but it threatens the health of all Albertans. My question is to the Premier. Will you finally put a stop to the secrecy and call for a public inquiry so that the full truth can be known?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is making an accusation here in the House in terms of our freedom of information officer – if there is some wrongdoing, put it in writing. Have him deliver it to you because you're responsible for that particular area, and we will investigate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Physician Recruitment

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The health workforce shortage in Alberta continues to be a concern. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is the government doing to attract internationally educated physicians to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government continues to be very active in international physician recruitment, particularly in the United Kingdom. Employment and Immigration staff have organized advertising campaigns. We've attended physician recruitment events in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. During visits to the *British Medical Journal* Careers Fair in London we identified and interviewed more than 200 interested physicians. We also fund visiting physician programs to the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the labour mobility provision under TILMA with British Columbia threaten these great recruitment efforts and empty physicians from rural Alberta, as some people are claiming?

Mr. Liepert: I don't believe that'll be the case, Mr. Speaker, because some of the internationally recruited physicians are licensed on a temporary basis to work in specific areas to meet specific needs. They are not licensed to work either elsewhere in the province or in any other province. However, you know, the reality of it is that a doctor is a private provider of health care services and is free to move about wherever he or she may choose.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: will the agreement with B.C.

create a single standard of licensing international physicians that will undermine Alberta's stringent requirements for licensing foreign physicians?

Mr. Liepert: No. That is not the understanding of the agreement, Mr. Speaker. The provinces will continue to register through the college the new physicians into our province and our country.

I think it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, however, that one of the member's previous supplementaries related to rural physicians. We are very fortunate in Alberta. We have something called the rural physician action plan, and that is a program that is working very well and, in fact, is enticing a number of physicians to rural parts of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Corporate farms are excluded from occupational health and safety rules by government regulation, yet for some reason workers in greenhouses and mushroom farms and nurseries get full protection under occupational health and safety. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why this strange discrepancy? Why does this government provide more protection to workers on mushroom farms than in feedlots? Is it their position that mushrooms are more dangerous than steers?

Mr. Groeneveld: No, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a particular problem with mushrooms, if that was the question.

Dr. Taft: That wasn't the question, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat it for the minister's sake. Maybe he doesn't know his own regulations, but they provide workers on mushroom farms with full occupational health and safety protection. Why does this government provide more protection to workers on mushroom farms, in particular, than, say, in feedlots, where workers are working with big steers?

Mr. Groeneveld: That was a better question. I can understand it this time. The answer couldn't go with no. Congratulations.

You know, we take farm safety very seriously, and any fatalities we have or farm-related injuries are certainly a concern to us. Consequently, we've just managed to put out \$360,000 over the next three years promoting farm safety. I don't think that we're picking winners and losers here. I think that probably we're looking after all of our agriculture workers to the best of our ability.

Dr. Taft: Well, do some background, and we'll come back to this, Mr. Minister.

The minister has repeatedly said in this House that you can't legislate common sense and that, therefore, farm workers don't need to be covered under workplace safety legislation. Does this minister feel that occupational health and safety legislation for any category of worker is unnecessary since he believes you can't legislate common sense?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, he understands – I'm certain he understands because I've explained it to him so many times – that farms are unique. Farms are where working families live and they play and they work. Consequently, we've said all along that education and training is where we have to go. I still maintain that you can't legislate common sense. However, probably the Liberals could, the common-sense people that they are.

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

Homelessness in East Calgary

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a growing number of homeless people outside of the downtown core. Some agencies in east Calgary report that 25 per cent of their clients are homeless people, which was not previously the case. My question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Have you noticed a rise in homeless people outside of the downtown core, specifically in east Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Montrose and I, of course, as you know, have adjacent constituencies, and we've discussed this very issue and know that we are working on it together. Yes, I have noticed an increase in the number of homeless people in northeast Calgary. Having said that, I want you to know that we have excellent organizations in our communities out in the northeast that are funded through government programs. Those agencies are finding transitional housing. They are assisting people with their own needs, like finding jobs, and also with accessing whatever it is that would help them to live independently.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why do you believe that there has been a rise in the homeless population in east Calgary specifically?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as the homeless community – and I know this to be true – learns more about the services that are located in various parts of the city that address their personal needs, that's the area of the city that they will migrate to. In east Calgary services are provided immediately for those who need help. Hon. member, as you know, we have excellent organizations, like the Heart of the Northeast in Pineridge, the North of McKnight resource centre, and the Sunrise Community Link Resource Centre, located in Forest Lawn. All of those agencies are working very closely not just with the homeless but also with other institutions like the hospitals and other agencies in the community.

2:10

Mr. Bhullar: Finally, to the same minister. What specific steps is the minister taking to address homelessness in east Calgary?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, a new program, that we have discussed here in the Assembly, is the Housing First philosophy, where housing is provided first for an individual who is homeless, and then the support services are provided through an aggressive assistance team in the community in order to prevent the cycle of homelessness. In northeast Calgary an institution that has been very active with the Housing First program is the Peter Lougheed hospital. Over the course of the past year there has been referral of 40 individuals, who now have permanent housing with supports. As well, the Radisson Heights office in Forest Lawn has provided hundreds of people with excellent assistance through the homeless and eviction prevention fund.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Health System Restructuring

(continued)

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health's new plan for Alberta's health care is heavy with broad strokes but pretty light on detail. It's been nine months since the minister made his sweeping changes to health, and he still can't give specifics or won't give specifics on how he plans to implement his changes. Either the minister is playing his cards close to his vest or he can't find his cards. To the minister: what specific action is the minister taking right now to get more health professionals to work full-time?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could go on for some time talking about the initiatives, first of all, that have taken place in this province relative to training more aides in the health care workforce, creating new opportunities to train Albertans for these particular roles, but I think the member is well aware of what is happening.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, I think so, Mr. Speaker. I think I found out more than he knows.

What is the minister going to do to address the reasons why health professionals most often only work part-time, such as shift work, long hours, and the availability of child care?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm not sure that the premise in the question is correct. We are certainly doing what we can to determine whether those are factors relative to individuals choosing to work part-time versus full-time. We will continue to roll out strategies around workforce initiatives, but we also in this document, released this morning, are going to look at incentives where people can be encouraged to work in areas that have greater challenges than others.

Mr. Taylor: Wow. Those specifics and a buck 65 would get me a cup of coffee.

Can the minister give the Assembly an example of a program that he is actually planning to implement which would specifically assist nursing staff to manage a work-life balance and therefore work more shifts? We'd get more full-time nurses out of the deal. Something, anything specific.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that it's getting close to the Liberal leadership, and this member is getting a little anxious because I know his colleague is out campaigning while he's here trying to make points in the Legislature. But, you know, all the member has to do is watch what happens out of Vision 2020, and his questions will be answered.

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

Online Shopping

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As holidays draw near, many Albertans are in a frenzy of purchasing gifts over the Internet, more so than any other people in any other province. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what measures is her ministry taking to protect the thousands of potential consumers from the pitfalls of shopping online this holiday season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shopping on the Internet is indeed very different from shopping at the mall. Consumers should be very cautious when buying products online. There are

protections under the Fair Trading Act, and we also have a specific regulation in place called the Internet sales contract regulation, that protects Albertans when buying goods or services over the Internet from Alberta businesses. This was created in 2001 and is one of the first of its kind in Canada. The regulation requires businesses to disclose specific information to consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. With a sizable amount of money potentially being transferred over the Internet, there's an increasing concern to hold accountable those who conduct illegal online activity. What steps are being put in place for consumers to file a complaint against such affronts to electronic commerce?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consumers can call our contact centre at 1-877-427-4088 or file a complaint online through the Service Alberta website. We'll investigate the complaint and take action if warranted. Businesses that violate our regulations could face fines of up to \$100,000 or two years in jail or both. We work with our partners in law enforcement within Alberta and nationally and internationally to investigate and prosecute cases of online fraud.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to speak a little slower so that the opposition can actually understand this time.

The second supplementary to the same minister: if the trend of online shopping continues to increase, are there any new initiatives or legislation that the minister intends to put forth?

Mrs. Klimchuk: With the strong protections that we currently have in place, our plan right now is to make sure that Albertans and Alberta businesses know about these protections. We have good information on the Service Alberta website outlining the details. Also, we have a number of consumer awareness strategies under way to inform Albertans about all of our consumer protection regulations. As always, Albertans shopping online should be cautious, only buying from reputable companies with a solid track record.

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

Kiwanis Place Seniors' Residence

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kiwanis Place provides lodge and independent living accommodations to 280 seniors in a renovated 18-storey high-rise apartment building. There are only three elevators to service this entire facility, so it takes an hour and a half to get all the residents down to the dining room for a meal. Many, including myself, are concerned over residents' safety. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why did the government approve funds for the maintenance of windows and balconies but not approve the cost of a new elevator from the same request?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety and security of our seniors in any of their lodgings is very important to us. We've had some good maintenance programs and grants that have gone out. I'm not familiar with why we didn't provide funding for the elevator but provided it for other areas, so I will review that and take that under consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister: you see, given that any time an ambulance is called, one of those elevators is locked off for use by the gurney, does the minister share my concern over the safety of the residents? We have 279 of them plus staff now trying to use two elevators for servicing 18 floors.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for that information. I will review what she has said and review the situation as well.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent.

Back to the same minister: given that currently the elevators are so small that an ambulance gurney cannot fit into it without being stood on its end, including when there is a senior strapped into it, which is pretty alarming for someone who's ill and frail, will the minister put a rush on the funding request for this elevator for Kiwanis Place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not familiar with this request, but I have made a commitment to review it at this time.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As tough times approach, it looks like the Tory government is going to increase the financial burden on today's families. U of A students are expecting a 30 per cent increase in costs for housing and tuition over three years. Just this weekend we learned that food bank use at the U of A has doubled in 2008. To the minister of advanced education: why won't you fully fund a freeze to tuition and student housing fees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we are concerned about the affordability framework for our students. That's one of the reasons why we'll be meeting with CAUS this afternoon. We're working on a number of initiatives in terms of the residences and what we might be able to do with creative solutions for that. We've increased the living allowances by 19 per cent over the last two years alone. We have probably the highest scholarship funding levels on a per capita basis in the country. We continue to work with our students to find innovative solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great that you're meeting, but in fact it was well over a year ago that student groups started asking for support in building new on-campus housing at the U of A and at the U of C, and still this government hasn't acted.

NAIT doesn't have a dorm, and many students are forced into signing one-year leases from private landlords when their school term is much shorter. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: why won't this government do anything to help students find safe, affordable housing on campus, where it's desperately needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question regarding student housing. I know that our minister of advanced education has answered it here in the Assembly over the past week or so on a few occasions. Having said that, I can tell you, hon. member – and I, too, have mentioned this before – that we are working with students through an interinstitutional study. This is the first study of its kind in Canada. We have matched the funding with the students: \$50,000 through the government, \$50,000 through the students. The minister and I are working very closely together to assist students with affordable housing.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The students don't need studies; they need shovels in the ground.

Asking students to study full time, take on crippling student loans, and work more than one job isn't good for anyone. Students in the social sciences are finding the limited federal pool of funding very difficult to access. We need a provincial endowment for these areas so that students can have the same access to research as those in the sciences, engineering, and medicine. To the minister of advanced education: why won't you create an endowment for social sciences research in Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I agree that the limited pool on the federal side is of concern for us. We're working with our federal counterparts to see what we might be able to do in that respect.

On endowments, Mr. Speaker, my goal is to ensure that the endowments we have are fully funded down the road, and that's what I'll continue to lobby for. We're working hard with the proponents of other endowments, but I think we want to work with long-term, innovative solutions to some of these issues that have been around for a number of years.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has experienced tremendous growth in the past few years, and now is catching its breath. Many in the business sector need workers and still cannot fill these positions with Albertans or other Canadians. During recent months I have had the opportunity to meet with many employers and many more valuable foreign workers. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. Are temporary foreign workers still an option for employers, and if so, what is the government doing for the temporary foreign worker program to be effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal temporary foreign worker program is based on employer need not only in boom

times but always. Labour shortages vary by industry and occupation. What hasn't changed in Alberta is the need for more workers. Temporary foreign workers are a valuable part of our full workforce, and we're working with the federal government to ensure that the program meets Alberta's unique labour needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. As already mentioned, there is an ever-changing business climate in Alberta. Often the temporary foreign workers are hired by one company but for various reasons may require the flexibility to move to another company or to a different type of job. What resources are available for the temporary foreign worker once they are in Alberta?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program is a federal program. The process requires an employer to obtain permission to hire temporary foreign workers. The workers then contract with that employer for that specific job. If the job ends, the federal government may require the temporary foreign worker to return to their home country. In some cases other preapproved employers may take them on, but they have to go through the federal government for a new work permit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the same hon. minister. The temporary foreign workers are going to be in Alberta for a while yet. Can the hon. minister explain what he's doing to ensure that they are treated fairly?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, every Alberta worker has the right to a fair workplace and is protected under employment standards legislation. That includes all of our temporary foreign workers. The Alberta government has two advisory offices which provide information and services. We also have translated an employee guide into 10 languages so that temporary foreign workers are aware of their rights and responsibilities in Alberta's workplace. We now have interpretation services available on our temporary foreign worker helpline, so they can get immediate support in their own language. My ministry has also launched the seven-language employment standards campaign.

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

Firearms Regulation

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hobbema just finished a gun amnesty where they acquired seven illegal weapons. In the same time frame of about four months two individuals were shot to death in that same community. As well, last night two more individuals were shot in a drive-by shooting in Calgary. To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. The RCMP characterize results of the amnesty as being disappointing. I agree with that assessment. Accordingly, does the Solicitor General also find these disappointing? What is he doing to make them more effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that when the community came forward with the request for a gun amnesty in Hobbema, we certainly hoped that there would be better results than

what we've seen. However, any gun taken off the street makes that community safer, so we will continue to encourage the community to work forward on that and other initiatives to take back their community and make it much safer.

Mr. Hehr: Increasingly Alberta has become the focal point of gangs and guns, which has resulted in increased violence in our communities. The number of officers announced by this government is far below what cities and police agencies were asking for. Accordingly, given the rash of recent violence, does the Solicitor General feel that he has enough boots on the streets to significantly reduce violent crime levels in Alberta?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the hon. member was when we were rolling out a whole bunch of our safe community initiatives over the past two years. There are 82 new, provincially funded police officers who will be hitting the street in Calgary and another 24 in a special gang unit. I would also say that over the past three years this government has provided the Calgary Police Service with over \$171 million to augment their service.

Mr. Hehr: This government has amended the Traffic Safety Act several times to allow police the authority to seize vehicles involved in prostitution and drug offences. Will this minister amend the legislation again to allow the police to seize vehicles that have a firearm not registered to an occupant of that vehicle to reduce gun violence?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I believe I've answered this question a number of times now in the House. Again, we already have legislation under the Criminal Code of this province that gives our police officers the opportunity to seize a vehicle if it's involved in a crime. The recent passage of Bill 50 in this House, which hasn't received royal assent yet, also will give the police more authority. So I believe we're looking after that concern.

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

Health Care Innovation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care across many Canadian provinces has been facing growing cost pressures. In Alberta health care now consumes 35.8 per cent of total government expenses, an increase of 161 per cent since 2000. Can the minister of health inform the House on what is being done to control health care costs while ensuring that Albertans have access to high-quality health care?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct in that in the past 10 years health care costs in this province have increased about 200 per cent, which is well beyond the annual inflation rate. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to more align our system and make it more efficient, and we believe that in the end it will be more accessible for Albertans. If at the end of the day there is a reduction in costs, that will be a bonus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what opposition members want to perpetuate, challenges in public health care as we know it are not unique to Alberta. At various times over the next 30 years six provinces will see over 50 per cent of their expenditures

going towards health care. This simply is not a burden I want to impose on future generations. To the same minister: will the government take a leadership role in Canada and challenge some of the basic premises of the Canada Health Act that prohibit provinces from creating innovative solutions to this very serious issue?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are a number of innovative solutions that can be undertaken within the confines of the Canada Health Act, and Alberta has certainly embarked and been a leader on many of those, including primary care networks, team-based clinical care, and most recently something called a patient navigator. Our objective is to work within the rules and create a more efficient, effective health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the hon. minister for changes he made to health care governance in this province. My constituents have overwhelmingly endorsed this move. However, they want the government to take more decisive and bold action on health care before we're forced to increase taxes, ration medical goods or services, or make ugly trade-offs in other important spending areas. Can the minister assure this House that the government is looking at all innovative options regarding our health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think our record speaks for itself. Since the election this past spring we've taken a number of initiatives, including laying the framework for ambulance services to move to the health system. We've introduced a new model for public health care. We've introduced the children's mental health plan. Today we released Vision 2020. I think you're going to see more initiatives coming in the next few weeks, and I believe that we're on the right path to making our system more accessible.

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

2:30

Children at Risk

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 77,000 Alberta children living below the poverty line are facing another Christmas of despair. Figures from March 2007 alone indicated that 17,000 children depended on food banks that month. This year demand at food banks has grown exponentially. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what special outreach programs does your ministry provide over the Christmas period to ensure that poverty-stricken children's needs are met at this highly stressful time of year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this question. We've seen a lot of reports come out lately on poverty and some of the statistics with young people. In terms of your question about what we're doing in communities, I think our number one role in our ministry is to connect these families and children with the supports that are out there, whether it be through parent link centres or FCSS or whatnot.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the Minister of Housing and Urban

Affairs. Over the last year 12,000 women took refuge in shelters in Alberta, but 14,000 more were turned away. How many more mothers and children will be forced out onto the street or to return to an abusive home because of inadequate capacity at women's shelters throughout this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that with our strong economy there are a number of Albertans that are struggling to make ends meet. We do have a number of very good programs. Those programs are located not only in this ministry but also the ministries of Employment and Immigration, Children and Youth Services. I can tell you that in this ministry we have the homeless eviction and prevention fund, which is helping Albertans that are at risk of losing their homes, including women and children, to stay in their homes. As well, we have an excellent affordable housing program for our low- to moderate-income Albertans that assists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In the past three years the number of women seeking help from shelters has doubled; the funding hasn't. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Over 58,000 households in Calgary are having difficulty paying rent due to the high cost of living and low wages. What assurances can you provide the thousands of Albertans on waiting lists for affordable housing that their needs will be met any time soon?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we have excellent programs. The affordable housing program, which you've indicated, hon. member, is now ongoing with an RFP process. We expect to have the announcement with that to the Assembly within the next two weeks or so. I want you to know that this program will provide 11,000 homes – that's what's mandated to this ministry through our Premier – over a five-year period. So I can tell you that that will assist, hon. member.

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

Highway Maintenance

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice that the Ministry of Transportation and Alberta's highway maintenance contractors have launched a safer winter highways campaign. Part of that campaign highlights the work done by these contractors; however, many of my constituents have concerns with highway maintenance and clearing since it was outsourced some years ago. My question is for the Minister of Transportation. How does his department make sure that highways are being maintained properly throughout the province?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the private contractors work under our set standards, and they can be penalized financially if they fail to meet those standards. We have provincial inspectors for each of the maintenance areas that go out there, and they make sure. They're checking on whether or not these contractors are doing the job that we ask them to do. I'd also like to point out that our system is very transparent, and anyone can view it on our website.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that's the case, then, if they're being properly done, why is it that some roads, like secondary 750 between Gift Lake and highway 88, are not being cleared let alone maintained, especially when children, busloads of children, have to travel these treacherous roads?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting how that hon. member asked that question. I have to say that if what she is saying is correct, then she's saying that I have an employee that's not doing his job, and I will get to the bottom of it. I'll tell you one thing: when we have bus routes and when we have children on the roads, we take great responsibility in that and try to make sure those roads are maintained first on our bus routes.

Ms Calahasen: Well, that's pretty clear as driven snow, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It has been noted that B.C. has had some problems with contractors who are not doing their work because they get paid before they do the job. Can the minister assure us in this House that this is not happening in this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, our maintenance contracts don't work like B.C.'s. B.C.'s get paid whether they work or not. In Alberta our contracts are done on a base pay at about 40 per cent and 60 per cent for the way they perform, so it's to their advantage to get out there and get the work done.

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

Automobile Insurance

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In November *Thompson's World Insurance News* reported that the lowest premiums quoted for auto insurance rates in the third quarter of 2008 increased by 7.5 per cent in Alberta. This is before the 5 per cent industry-wide increase that was authorized by the Automobile Insurance Rate Board became effective. My question is to the minister of finance. Why is the minister allowing this increase in auto insurance quotes to go up so substantially at this time?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, our increases, in fact, were not significantly felt when we had the hearings in August and even as a result of the decision made by the rate board. We've had very little response to that. We're waiting, further, for more response as a result of the court deliberations over the legitimacy of the Alberta legislation dealing with soft tissue injury.

Ms Blakeman: It's on the front page of *Thompson's*, November 10. Second question to the minister of finance: given that Ontario does not have a cap on minor injuries like Alberta and they only saw a .8 per cent increase in the third quarter of 2008 on their insurance quotes, can the minister explain this discrepancy?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the issues in Ontario. When they come and represent the issues in front of the rate board, they have to legitimize what they believe the projected costs will be. They have to provide that information. I'd be prepared to provide the most recent past information for this House. We've had quite a bit of discussion on this during the spring session, but overwhelmingly I found that the evidence provided was quite acceptable. After the two days of rate hearings people seemed generally satisfied that some inflation, bearing Alberta conditions, was appropriate.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: how much is the legal action to appeal the striking down of the minor injury cap to the Supreme Court going to cost Albertans?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that report could be filed after we have a total cost of that. To date that would be something that I wouldn't have a complete costing on. Certainly, I'd be prepared to undertake to provide that to the House at a later date when it is available or in the new year when it's possible. I think the hon. member would be familiar that we would likely not have that at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would like to supplement a question.

Health System Restructuring

(continued)

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, last week the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked me some questions relative to Mr. Jim Saunders at the Alberta Health Services Board.* I've done some inquiring. The contract of Mr. Saunders concluded recently, and he has gone on to other pursuits. I wanted to make sure that the House and the member were aware of that because I know that it'll help him sleep easier tonight. He won't have to worry about that private-sector bogeyman jumping out of the closet and scaring him.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as per our protocol, when a minister provides a supplemental response, that affords the private member raising the question an opportunity to raise a supplemental, so I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for a supplemental.

2:40

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, regarding Mr. Jim Saunders, chief operating officer, the gentleman who makes \$395,000 currently as an interim manager: what discretion does Mr. Saunders have over all the legal implications of the centralization plan before you privatize further our public health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member didn't listen to the answer. The individual is no longer employed by Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Opposition to Proposed Gravel Pit

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address the future of a beautiful part of the riding I am honoured to represent. The beautiful Woodbend natural area in the Edmonton river valley is the city's largest natural area and is home to an array of springs and wetlands; a rich and diverse fishery of 27 species; the capital region's largest population of deer and other large and small animals; and an ecologically vital connectivity to ravines and woodlands, Big Island, and the city of Edmonton's sand dunes, white birch woodlot natural area. I rise today to support the efforts of the concerned citizens in my constituency, Edmontonians, city

councillors, and the North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society associated with a proposed gravel pit for this natural area. These groups are working together to ban natural resources extraction in the city of Edmonton river valley. I believe that this goal is consistent with the government's ribbon of green vision of the river valley. I commend the Premier for providing \$50 million to River Valley Alliance.

Mr. Speaker, later today I will have the distinct privilege to present the largest petition ever tabled in this Assembly's history, with 7,771 signatures. This petition calls for the government to ensure that the proper environmental reviews are implemented in regard to the proposed gravel pit. I will work with my colleagues to strive to protect this very important area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World AIDS Day

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is the 20th anniversary of health ministers from around the world agreeing to naming this World AIDS Day, December 1. Today the underlying concept of solidarity and awareness continues. We can certainly show some successes. Almost every country has a policy on HIV, although too many have not implemented or funded it. Treatment can allow people to live longer, productive lives, but we still need to make it available to the 69 per cent of people around the globe who don't receive treatment. That matters because infection rates continue to increase at almost three times faster than people receiving treatment.

The World AIDS Day campaign asks people to lead, empower, and deliver. Alberta could take a step in this direction by writing sexual orientation into human rights legislation. But let me not mislead my colleagues into thinking that AIDS is primarily a gay disease. Women, newborn babies, young people, intravenous drug users, even seniors are all groups which have shown an increase in HIV infections.

In Edmonton we are marking the day with a nondenominational evening ceremony dedicated to remembering those we have lost to HIV/AIDS, followed by a candlelight walk. The evening is open to the general public. I invite everyone to join us this evening, December 1, 7 p.m., at the Citadel Theatre.

Thank you.

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

Athletic Therapists

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary physical therapy and access to orthopaedic assessment lists can be sometimes six to eight weeks. This has a significant negative impact on the quality of life of Albertans and on our economy. I rise today to speak to an opportunity. Athletic therapists are devoted to the health and wellness of physically active individuals. This ranges from the general public to professional or industrial athletes. The opportunity is to provide increased flexibility within our health care system.

Athletic therapists are represented by both the Canadian Athletic Therapists' Association and the Alberta Athletic Therapists Association. They act in both a preventative and reactive capacity, providing assessment as well as rehabilitative and therapeutic support in order to help Albertans get back to the sports and jobs that they love faster and in stronger and in better shape. The certification process that athletic therapists must complete is one of the most stringent in the health care system, and this combines high academic standards as well as practical, on-the-job training. Athletic therapists are

*See p.2072, left col., para. 7

currently limited in their ability to practice within the public health care system, and as such their services are only available to those Albertans who pay.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, the huge opportunity. The Alberta Athletic Therapists Association has 110 members with a variety of skills and expertise. In keeping with the spirit of the health workforce action plan's call for more flexibility and greater choice, I am supporting the call for athletic therapists to become a self-regulated profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canadian Citizenship Ceremony in Brooks

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadian citizenship is a privilege we often take for granted. However, it is something to be celebrated and cherished and is one of the most important bonds we share. Citizenship was celebrated in the city of Brooks on November 25 and 26, when 351 people became Canadian citizens in four separate ceremonies. These new citizens from 69 countries clearly value the privilege of becoming Canadians, demonstrated in the pride and emotion that dominated each of the ceremonies, newfound rights and freedoms for many of them.

These were the first ever citizenship ceremonies in Brooks as the city and the Grasslands school district organized the event to include community involvement. Hundreds of residents witnessed the event, which was hosted in the Griffin Park school theatre with students involved greeting and welcoming those in attendance. The Griffin Park choir and soloists provided musical preludes to each ceremony. Many students attended and witnessed their classmates and their families take the oath of citizenship. The significance of these ceremonies to the community was clearly reflected in the many positive comments made to me this past weekend in Brooks, significant to both new and long-time Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to rise today to salute these new Canadians and acknowledge the citizenship ceremonies that took place in Brooks last week. I urge all of my colleagues to reflect on the rights and privileges, obligations and responsibilities that we all value and strive to protect as citizens of Canada and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Aboriginal Health Careers Bursary

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to recognize the continued success of the aboriginal health careers bursary program. My colleague the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology had the honour of introducing four of this year's 51 recipients in the Assembly on November 25.

The creation of this bursary was recommended in the aboriginal health strategy for Alberta Health released in 1995 and is intended to encourage aboriginal Albertans to pursue postsecondary education in health-related fields. When this was first thought of, many young aboriginal people did not pursue these types of careers due to many reasons, one of which was financial. Knowing that the aboriginal community was the fastest and youngest population in Canada, surely if we created this bursary, we could get young, dedicated aboriginal Albertans to participate, and participate they did. In fact, since its inception the program has awarded 653 bursaries worth over \$2.9 million. Each student could receive anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000 that can be used to cover tuition, books, and living expenses. This '08-09 year they are fully subsidized.

Mr. Speaker, this bursary program helps to fulfill the ever-present demand for health care professionals and encourages participation from an unrepresented group within Alberta. Congratulations to all, and a big thank you to the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology for their continued support for this very important program.

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

2:50

OH Ranch

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to recognize the designation of OH Ranch as a heritage rangeland. OH Ranch is one of the oldest ranches in Alberta, with a 125-year legacy of grazing and stewardship. The heritage rangeland designation will preserve one of Alberta's largest areas of native grassland, more than 10,000 acres, with forests, willow groves, shrublands, and wildlife for all future generations. This designation ensures the continuation of traditional ranching practices that have managed sensitive native prairies in southern Alberta for generations.

I commend the owners of OH Ranch, Daryl K. "Doc" Seaman and his family, for their initiative in bringing this proposal to government. It's an absolutely amazing gift.

In addition to the public land that's being protected, the OH Ranch is placing the adjacent private land under conservation easements with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society. Conservation easements are voluntary agreements which limit the amount and type of development that can occur on a property. The easements will be negotiated to preserve the natural character and ecological integrity of the land. They'll be registered with the title to the OH Ranch, ensuring that the grasslands, wildlife habitat, and watersheds of the ranch will be preserved forever. It's a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when private citizens, government, and stakeholders work together to achieve a common goal.

I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating and thanking the owners and staff of the OH Ranch on the 125th anniversary of this beautiful, historic land and for their commitment to being responsible stewards of this important legacy for Alberta.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Health it's my pleasure to rise today and table the requisite number of copies of the committee's report on public meetings. Over the course of three meetings in November the committee heard from seven organizations, one individual, and the Department of Health and Wellness. I'd like to thank the presenters for their informative presentations and for bringing these important matters to the committee's attention. The report I'm tabling today lists the groups with which the committee met and summarizes the subject matter of each presentation.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is truly a remarkable feat, and I commend those citizens who feel so strongly to work so hard to gather these signatures. This type of citizen involvement is very

important in our democracy. I will work with my colleagues to protect this very important area.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you repeat how many signatures there are on this petition.

Mr. Xiao: Oh, 7,771.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that's the largest number of signatures ever on a petition in the history of the province of Alberta. The previous high was on March 22, '06, with a petition that had 7,613 signatures.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the petition I am tabling has only 2,000 signatures to date, I'm sure they will grow. The petitions call upon the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace," and I'm contributing close to 200 more signatures.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 138 signatures which urges the government of Alberta to revise its policies to "eliminate child poverty and its many manifestations in Alberta."

In addition, I would like to table a petition which 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." This petition has 37 signatures on it and is in addition to the 1,243 signatures which I presented on Monday.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the 2007-08 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, FOIP, annual report. This is the 13th annual report summarizing the operation of the act. The report outlines some of the significant accomplishments for the 2007-08 fiscal year and includes FOIP statistics showing the number of requests made to the Alberta government and local public bodies as well as the response times. Alberta's FOIP Act came into effect in 1995. Since then, provincial government bodies have responded to nearly 28,000 requests for information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, November 29, I attended the *Lady of the Moon* Chinese opera at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. It was a great show, and I am sure everyone there really enjoyed it. I'm tabling five copies of the program here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling two e-mails, the first from Charlotte Kingston, the second from Holly Heffernan. Both ladies are calling upon the government to commit to "full funding for the Safe Visitation pilot program and expand it across the province so that all children are safe."

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 e-mails between health officials that we received through a FOIP request referred to in the questions today by the leader of the third party. Almost all of the information in these e-mails has been withheld.

The second document I'd like to table is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to the Premier requesting a public inquiry into Alberta's current syphilis epidemic and related issues.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of Mr. Berger, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the final report, dated June 2008, entitled An Open Market for CWB Grain, prepared by Informa Economics.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Leader of the Official Opposition has advised that he will not be proceeding with his point of order, so it's Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 210

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise before this Assembly and move Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008.

Bullying is a terrible problem in all of our schools. It can take on all sorts of forms, be it cyberbullying, taunts about ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities. It undermines safety for staff and students, it distracts from the learning environment, and it has horrific emotional consequences for those who are targeted. We need to take action to stop bullying in all of its forms, and this legislation will do that.

We've all read the stories in the newspaper, Mr. Speaker, stories about students who were bullied to the point where they were terrified to go to school, who can't learn because they're scared, who harm themselves or others in response to the hell that we've put them through. Some actions have been taken to stop bullying and educate the public about its harmful effects, but the reality is that bullying keeps happening. We're still reading about heartbreaking stories in the newspaper and watching stories about school violence on the evening news.

I've talked to a lot of people in the community about this issue, with my friends who are teachers and principals, with constituents who have children who are bullied, with our dedicated police officers, who work tirelessly to make our schools a safer place to

learn. I want to take a moment to acknowledge those who have worked so hard on this bill. Your expertise and insight have been invaluable to me in developing this legislation. You've taken the time to meet with me on many occasions and share your experience and creativity with me. My Leg. assistant, Brock Mulligan, has spent countless hours working on this legislation and attending meetings. Thanks, buddy.

Mr. Speaker, in my conversations with the police and other stakeholders I've learned that there are a number of barriers to eliminating bullying. First, there is no comprehensive system to document and report bullying. When an incident happens, it comes to the principal, and they deal with it as they see fit. If the bully moves to another school, the record may not follow them. This isn't acceptable. We need to make sure that our principals know the history of those coming to the school.

3:00

It is also important to have documentation in instances where serious and escalating incidents reach court. These cases that we read about in the newspaper, where the harassment escalates and where serious injuries are involved, simply must be dealt with in a court of law. Police officers who are experienced in dealing with these types of cases tell me that they lack that kind of documentation. That could seriously hinder them in court.

Everybody present may know that there is a serious and dangerous pattern of bullying that exists, Mr. Speaker, but it's not written down, and it's hard to prove. This legislation will ensure that the documentation is there, and the case can be dealt with effectively. School principals will be required to report all bullying cases to the local school board, and an annual report of these incidents must also be made to the minister.

A second barrier to dealing effectively with bullying involves weapons. We're hearing them talk about knives, bats, clubs, pool cues, knuckle busters, stuff that can be used to intimidate and inflict serious harm. Right now police have to prove intent when they find a weapon. They can find a knife in a student's backpack, but unless the student tells the police officer that they intend to harm someone or unless they actually do harm someone, there's not much that can be done.

Waiting for an incident to occur is ridiculous, and I don't know many students who go to the police and say: excuse me, Mr. Officer, but I'm planning to use this weapon to assault another student. Mr. Speaker, we need to take action immediately. Billy clubs and brass knuckles have no place in our schools. This bill would explicitly ban these items from Alberta schools. Students who contravene this legislation by bringing these items to school will be in violation of the School Act, and that act carries some serious penalties, including the possibility of a court summons.

I know that this bill may seem dry and detached to some. Someone may be saying: "Mandatory reporting. That's sure going to scare those bullies." Well, Mr. Speaker, those who choose to bully should be scared of this legislation. It's going to stop repeat bullies from running to another school and not having their records follow, it's going to stop them from going to court and hiding behind a veil of hearsay, and it's going to give our school officials a way to track incidents and to compile statistics.

I've read about specific communities that have bullying problems, but by the time we've read about it, it's too late. Our youth have already been terrorized by their peers. I think these sorts of things should come to the attention of policy-makers first. We shouldn't have to read about bullying being on the rise in a community. We should have statistics to identify the trend. Then we can allocate the right resources to stop the problem and save our youth from trauma.

I know some think that bullying is an innocent phenomenon, just

some innocent teasing in the schoolyard, and that involving police and administrators is overkill. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to share a couple of stories that I've read in my research. One involves a boy in Ontario that was bullied viciously. He was harassed at school, online, on his cellphone, literally terrorized 24/7. Eventually this young man took his own life, dead at the age of 15. This case illustrates not only the harm of bullying but also a sad irony. The victims have no place to hide. You can't hide in the classroom or on the playground. The daily bus ride can become a painful ordeal. With the Internet, Facebook, and cellphones there is no place to hide, yet bullies have often been able to hide in our system. They can move to another school. They can argue in court that they would never bully, and with no paper trail it's a credible argument.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This bill is going to remove that protection for bullies, bullies who taunt and torment relentlessly. Remember the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? Well, names do hurt. I read about a young girl who was repeatedly called fat cow, dyke, whore by some cruel peers. Now, how can that not be damaging? I've heard the argument that bullying is usually isolated, that most students don't experience it. Well, statistics that I was able to obtain argue otherwise. A study by the University of Toronto found that 1 in 5 students had been bullied online, that 1 in 3 had been bullied by another student using the Internet, and that's just cyberbullying. There are all kinds of other ways to bully, too.

Clearly, this is a widespread problem, and we need to have better statistics. Being able to find out how many students were cyberbullied in Toronto is somewhat useful, but I'd rather be able to find out about how students were bullied in Calgary-Fish Creek and at any given school within my community. Policy-makers need to be able to allocate the resources to tackle this problem. We need to be able to identify new trends like cyberbullying and to know which schools have problems. Then we can stop the problem, Mr. Speaker.

This bill isn't about ruining the reputation of certain schools, and it's not a knee-jerk reaction to a small problem. It's about protecting our children from serious harm, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forth private member's Bill 210, enhanced safety for students and teachers. I very much wish that there was more time left to debate this bill so that it could pass through not only second but into committee and third and have an opportunity for further discussion and for amendments to be brought forward.

While this bill is extremely well intended and there is no doubt that bullying takes place in various forms, in order for legislation to curb bullying, funding is required, and very definitive regulations are necessary. We've had previous circumstances, for example, where the government mandated daily phys ed for children, but without providing either the equipment or the infrastructure for that daily phys ed to occur, the best intentions often gang a-gley, or go astray, as the poem goes, because of lack of funding.

The motivation behind this bill and the reporting mechanisms for infractions concerning banned items and bullying and the responses to these infractions will be standardized across the province, and that is important. Educational measures programs will have to be instituted and, as I mentioned, funded if the school board does not already have them in place, and funding is key to this taking place.

The power of principals to suspend students may be actually eroded by this bill as it is stated, and the role of peace officers in schools seems to increase. It could potentially create a problem with current legislation and potentially lead to a greater number of appeals, as is noted in section 5 of the bill. It does not seem to enhance the overall protection of students and teachers.

Now, while I'm supporting this bill because of its intention to reduce bullying, had there been the opportunity to get to Committee of the Whole, I might have taken two different approaches. One would be to increase the number of definitions under which the charge of bullying could be brought forward, and those charges would include such things as sexual orientation. They would include such situations as disability. How many times have we as children or teachers heard a child being called a fag or, as the hon. proposer of the bill put forward, a dyke or other sexually oriented slurs? How many times have we heard on the field or in the classroom, "Oh, sit down, you fag," which is, obviously, a situation of sexual orientation? It's a very cutting one. It cuts the child whose orientation is different from that of his class members, but it also leaves very much a sting to a child, whether or not their orientation is the same as those of their other classmates. How many times have we heard a child or someone use the derogatory term: oh, you retard? This is a clear shot at individuals suffering from disabilities.

As I have mentioned in this House, the latest StatsCan figures for children living below the poverty line in Alberta come out at 77,500. Poverty is an ongoing experience that far too many children endure within the school situations, and poverty sets you automatically outside of the bounds of an awful lot of your classmates: children and families having to share who gets to wear the snow boots today and who gets to wear the running shoes, children who are wandering around the schools sockless because they don't have the socks to wear or it's their older brother's or sister's turn that day. Poverty is frequently the cause of bullying.

3:10

Another area the bill doesn't deal with is religious preference or the cultural attributes of a particular religion. Beyond those areas, the exclusions to this bill, we still would omit bullying based on size, attractiveness or lack thereof – we've had the recent experience of redheadedness – and many other reasons kids bully other kids. So we could try and be all inclusive, or another option would be to strike any mention of a particular example since children are so creative and there are no rational reasons to bully another child. We also need clarification as to what educational measures programs are, what will be involved in instituting them, where the funding is going to come from, et cetera.

Another main reason for concern occurs in section 5. There are two main problems with section 5. First, it seems to contradict existing legislation in the School Act, and secondly, it erodes the powers currently held by principals to suspend students guilty of bullying or possessing banned items. While the intent is great, the language of the legislation requires rewriting, and while I support its intent, we need to strengthen it if it was ever going to be enacted and, obviously, brought into law.

There's been a lot of coverage of bullying recently, in particular kicking redheads, bullying on the basis of sexual orientation, as I mentioned before, and, as the hon. promoter of the bill, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, pointed out, a new phenomenon based on electronic bullying methods, and that's cyberbullying. We've had circumstances where individuals, a mother actually, went onto the Internet posing as a young adolescent boy, and the end result was that the individual, who was basically being bullied, committed suicide.

Whether it's the type of bullying I experienced as a grade 8

student, basically being swarmed and knocked down and forced to either run or cower and take the kicks and punches, or whether it's the type of bullying that is more of the whisper campaign, that I've noticed especially from girls, whether it's a kick or whether it's a beating of your ego that takes place, bullying has no place in a school, and therefore we have to make sure that we have legislation that attempts in a stronger fashion, both in wording and enforcement and in funding, to achieve this end.

A recent article in the Alberta Teachers' Association newsletter, while expressing agreement for the recommendations that were being put forward in Bill 210, enhanced safety for students and teachers, noted that although the bill is well intentioned, there are serious problems within the bill itself.

B.C. passed a law requiring British Columbia schools to have codes of conduct for students and, therefore, zero tolerance of bullying. Ontario states that bullying is a cause for suspension. We can look at what has taken place in other provinces to attempt to strengthen the intent of Bill 210.

Also, as a teacher I have found that there are limited places where a bully can go. A number of the behavioural adaptation programs have had their funding cut, so what happens is that bullies get bounced to and from schools without a whole lot of warning to the receiving schools. The notion that maybe you confiscate their brass knuckles or their baseball bats or, in the case of high school students, when they get into machetes – we need more.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, being put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I think it is fair to say that many members of this Assembly would support a bill that protects the safety of children and staff in schools. This is exactly what Bill 210 intends to do. Bill 210 would require all people on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and peaceful manner that would not be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others nor impact the school's safe learning environment. Additionally, Bill 210 would prohibit the possession of drug paraphernalia as well as any tool or device that is intended to cause harm to others on school property or during school hours. Any of these violations can result in police intervention.

Local police involvement can result in a meeting with the student, parent or guardian, and school administration to discuss appropriate consequences and next steps for the student. Involving local authorities has become essential because bullying and the possession of harmful devices have escalated to a level that only these professionals are trained to deal with.

The intent of Bill 210 follows one of the government's top five priorities: promoting strong and vibrant communities and reducing crimes so Albertans feel safe. There is federal and provincial legislation in place to protect the safety of individuals. This bill works to extend that same protection on school grounds. Bullying and possession of drug paraphernalia and/or any device that can potentially cause harm to others pose a serious threat to the safety of students on school grounds and, ultimately, our communities. Weapons are a growing concern for schools because many have been found on students on school property, and any type of weapon that is on school grounds compromises the safety of staff and students.

Early intervention is vital in order to stop children from falling into a cycle of bullying. Bullying which is characterized by a repeat pattern of unprovoked, aggressive behaviours carried out to harm or control another person can be linked to future criminal behaviour.

It can also be linked to family violence. It is clear that targeted and sometimes innovative strategies such as those proposed in Bill 210 are needed to ensure appropriate intervention and protection. It is also important that follow-up support is provided. This was reinforced by the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying.

The Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was announced in October of 2003 to gather stakeholders and communities together to recommend solutions to the problems of family violence. The expert panel emphasized the importance of early childhood development and school-age strategy as society's best chance to create a positive change. In addition, Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was established in March 2007 to gather input and ideas from Albertans on ways to reduce crime, enhance community safety, and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.

The executive summary of the Keeping Communities Safe report says that not enough is being done to prevent crime. They identified that starting young and addressing the factors that put children and youth at risk is a proven strategy and one that will have the best results in the longer term. Bill 210 provides the necessary support the Alberta roundtable and Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force recommended.

Stats Canada did a nation-wide study that was conducted in voluntarily participating schools in the 2007-2008 school year, surveying over 30,000 students in total. Of those who participated in the study, 23 per cent of secondary school students and over 36 per cent of elementary school student reported having been bullied at least once in the previous month. Further, research shows that bullying of overweight children gets more frequent and more violent as they move into their teen years. This can scar a child's self-esteem and severely hamper, even ruin, their quality of life.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, bullying is not the same today as it was a generation ago. Now bullying can be fatal. Physical and emotional bullying can severely harm a child. It can get to the point where the child who is being bullied no longer wants to even attend school. It is a child's right to obtain an education, and it is our role to make sure that children are safe while they are on school property, including school buses. We need to make sure that Alberta schools remain welcoming to students so that they are excited to come to school. We want children to be inspired to learn, but this can be difficult if they're feeling isolated and insecure as a consequence of being bullied.

Most of us here are mothers or fathers and care deeply about our children and our communities. We will go to any length to make sure they remain safe. This is why I support Bill 210. I want to do everything I can to make sure our children's safety is not compromised.

I fully acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that this government has an aggressive plan to make sure that Alberta's communities are safe, but there is still more work to be done to make sure that our schools are safe. I feel as though Bill 210 fits into that plan. Bill 210 will allow this government to maintain control of this issue by giving the schools and police the tools they need to prevent or intervene when bullying becomes a problem and, perhaps more importantly, before it becomes extreme.

Bullying behaviour is unacceptable at any time and is not a normal part of growing up. Bill 210 is an opportunity to teach children right from wrong when they are young so that they do not continually repeat destructive behaviour throughout their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 210 because I put children's safety and security first. I'm sure the children of our province would support this legislation. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 210, enhanced safety for students and teachers. There's no doubt that I agree completely with the intention of the bill. There's no doubt that not only in my time at schools but at schools today there is often quite a bit of bullying and carrying on that really makes it difficult for people to engage in learning and, in fact, often makes people fearful to attend school and to really enjoy the entire practice of going to school. We should be doing our all as a governing body to ensure that all people have their values respected in our school classrooms, and this bill goes some measure to ensuring that that happens.

If we take a look at it, there are a couple of areas where I really like it. It looks like it will allow for infractions that are concerning bullying or banned items to be reported so that a teacher becomes aware of this happening. These then are reported to a principal, and they can take action as they deem fit to follow up on this situation to ensure that this bullying is kept to a minimum. I think that's a good thing as it alerts the power that is in charge in the school that the buck stops with him or her, and they can take appropriate action.

There are a few amendments that I would like to offer for Bill 210. They would be for the definition of bullying to include things like sexual orientation and disability and religion. Of course, these more align with our section 15 Charter rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You can almost even include that whole section verbatim and then put any analogous ground on the end of it. I think that would make the bill much more complete.

Of course, I would leave out things like bullying on the basis of size, attractiveness, redheadedness, and a lot of things. Nevertheless, I think that at this time if we simply went down and listed every single thing that people or kids find reasons to bully every other kid about, you might narrow it down to people who are using Batman lunch boxes or whatever is not in style for the day. That is often very difficult to do, so I would simply urge that an amendment be made along the lines of adopting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms language and probably even including more up-to-date language as instituted in the Vriend decision, that we're still behind on, noting that our human rights legislation has not incorporated protection for our GBLT community. That's not what we're here to discuss, but I just noted that the Justice minister was paying avid attention to what I was saying, so I wanted to make that point and throw that out there.

Other than those few amendments that I would offer, I think there is some merit to this bill, and I would just hope that we would make some of those changes to be more inclusive of what is actually happening in our classrooms.

Other than that, Mr. Speaker, I've said my piece on this and will let someone else weigh in on the bill if they so choose. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. As a teacher of 36 years I have a wealth of experience in dealing with problems that bullying causes. I have witnessed many accounts of this type of harassment during my tenure as a school professional. From name-calling to physical abuse, students become victims of bullying for years. Names can

follow a student for their entire school life, from elementary all the way through high school. Bullying is something that we as elected members of this province should do everything in our power to prevent.

Mr. Speaker, you do not have to be a teacher to know that bullying exists. Many of us have had first-hand experience of this form of control that one person or group of individuals exerts on others. We may have seen classmates or coworkers constantly mistreated by others. We may have witnessed a family member come home frustrated, or we have been unfortunate enough to have gone through this treatment ourselves. If any member in this Assembly has ever experienced first-hand the negative effects of bullying, I'm sure they would want to do everything possible to rid school systems of this form of abuse.

Bill 210 is a positive step forward to achieving the mental well-being for staff and students. This comfort and security is vital for the productive learning and teaching environment. By amending the School Act, the proposed legislation would better equip our schools with a direction on how to handle incidents involving bullying and other conduct that creates an unproductive learning atmosphere. Without a safe school setting students begin to react negatively in their place of learning.

Mr. Speaker, many individuals will avoid situations where they feel threatened. It is part of human nature to protect oneself. Some children are fearful to play in certain areas of the school grounds during recess and will avoid those areas. Many students hate taking the school bus because of the treatment they get from other students, so they avoid that. Other individuals learn to take long routes home to keep safe. I've even seen students stay home from school entirely because they felt unwelcome at the school. This is unacceptable for schools in our great province.

Mr. Speaker, these are passive reactions to bullying, but some students don't react passively. Many parents tell students to fight back and stand up to a bully because this is the only thing a bully understands. In extreme cases these students may feel threatened and lash out with violent reactions against the bully. There are cases of children bringing weapons into school in order to protect themselves, keeping knives, bats, and even guns in their lockers. With the tragic events that have happened over the past 10 years across North America, there needs to be a mechanism in place that will stop this violent reaction before it becomes irreversible. Under Bill 210 all schools will be required to record and report any incidents that involve tools or devices or the possession of drug paraphernalia that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, the Internet has ushered in more difficulties for teachers and students when it comes to bullying. The Internet can become a tool in the hands of a bully. Rumours can spread quicker and to more people than ever before. It is hard to prevent every single incident of bullying that can occur on a daily basis. It is even more difficult to prevent Internet abuse from spreading and hurting the individuals in question. With the availability of Internet through cellphones and other electronic devices, any student can have access to the Internet all hours of the day. I have known girls who used the Internet program MSN Messenger to spread rumours about other girls. It became so bad that that girl had to switch schools because she could not tolerate the torment she received in school about what took place over the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, there are some parents and individuals who do not take bullying seriously. They may say things like, "Oh, kids will be kids" and defend the students responsible for causing another

student's grief. Bullies may be part of the cool crowd, and the social hierarchy makes it hard for a student to rat them out to the principal or to a teacher for fear of being ostracized by their peers even further. We cannot just pass these actions off as nothing because there are a great many children, adolescents, teenagers, and adults who are affected daily by this harassment.

Mr. Speaker, the root cause as to why such actions take place is highly debatable. Family life, music, movies, magazines, newspapers, and the website are among the hundreds of reasons why one individual may bully another. I don't think that this Assembly should have to wait until the exact cause of bullying is determined before taking action. We as the government work towards stopping this problem by increasing the ability of students, teachers, family members to handle this complex issue.

Bullies need to be dealt with so that other kids can feel safe and welcome in their schools. That is why I am so supportive of this legislation. By requiring all persons on school property to conduct themselves in a peaceable manner so as not to cause any mental or physical stress on others, Bill 210 provides the opportunity to protect every individual within our learning institutions. This legislation is a positive step towards dealing with the increasing problem both teachers and students face each and every day.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this piece of legislation and urge all members of the Assembly to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's an honour to be able to rise to speak to Bill 210, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. I also, like all the previous speakers, want to say that I very much support the objectives that clearly underline this bill and the attempt on the part of this member to address this very serious problem and to identify it and, I would say, to codify the problem and to as a result raise the standards and expectations of having it addressed and taken seriously. I think all those things are very good.

There are a few concerns with respect to the way in which the bill goes about achieving that objective. A couple of them have already been mentioned, but I think they're worth repeating. The first is with respect to the grounds that have been identified in the bill as constituting bullying under the legislation. In particular, several grounds which have not been mentioned in the bill have been outlined, and they include, of course, the absence of protection on the basis of sexual orientation and also protection on the basis of disability. I believe that another member also spoke about economic status as another ground.

I think that ultimately the concern I have here is that this is not really an issue that should be addressed through a list of prohibited grounds for bullying. I think that bullying is in and of itself something that goes beyond a simple act intentionally designed to hurt someone on the basis of certain grounds. People tend to look at it through the same lens as how you would consider questions of discrimination, but bullying is a slightly different animal, if you will, and I would say that, really, in the long term it's best to avoid a list at all. I wouldn't necessarily agree that I would sort of borrow, for instance, from the Charter list of grounds, but in fact I would simply define the behaviour and not get lost in the reason underlying the behaviour.

The reality is that in the school system there is often the case – it's not even in the school system. In workplaces, in community halls, on playgrounds, everywhere, you know, bullying occurs for reasons

that are not directly linked to underlying sexual discrimination or racism or anything like that. It's simply an exercise of power by one person with respect to another person.

In my pre-election days I did have the experience on a number of occasions of dealing with either training or advocacy with respect to issues of harassment in the workplace. One of the things that became very clear was that often the harassment didn't occur because the person's skin was a different colour or because they were a particular gender or because they were disabled. It just occurred because there was a personal issue or a personal dislike between the harasser and the victim of the harassment. In that particular case the person simply was exercising their ability to exercise power over someone else that they didn't like. It really was no more rational than that. That kind of behaviour is certainly not acceptable.

I would suggest, then, that because it's too difficult to identify the grounds or the reason behind that kind of behaviour, what you should really be doing is prohibiting the behaviour and not linking the behaviour's prohibition to having to prove a certain intent underneath it. I think that if you do that, you then end up tying yourself up in knots, and the legislation becomes very onerous to actually implement. That would be my first comment.

The other thing is that typically when you're dealing with bullying and harassment, ultimately you need to assess it from the subjective experience of the behaviour by the victim. That needs to be the way in which it's assessed rather than the intent of the perpetrator because you then get into this whole debate over whether the perpetrator intended for whatever harassing or bullying behaviour to have been perceived that way.

Another concern that I have with the bill as it's currently structured relates to the definition of what is bullying, and that's the case in two ways. First of all, it talks about written or verbal abuse. Again, that's kind of a really loaded definition, so I'm not exactly sure. If a teacher, for instance, thought that a child was engaging in bullying and then you had to get involved in this whole debate over whether they were or they were not, you'd have to unpack what abuse means. I think that, in and of itself, makes the act very onerous to administer. So I would rather see it be more like, you know, verbal behaviour or written behaviour.

3:40

The other concern, of course, is that by limiting it to, sort of, verbal and written, you then get into the situation with cyberbullying – and I think a number of speakers have already spoken about it – where someone Photoshops a picture of a classmate and puts that on a website. It's not really written and it's not really verbal, but it's clearly designed to bully that person. Again, is the language perhaps a little bit too limiting?

Another concern – again, just to be clear, this is just a concern. This is definitely a bill that I believe is designed to achieve an important object. These are only concerns that I'm throwing out there and not, ultimately, rejection-level critiques. Another concern is with respect to the inclusion of stealing as a means of bullying and assault or threats of assault as a means of bullying. In my view all three of those things are really criminal behaviour. So I'm a little worried that you run the risk of taking what should be perceived as criminal behaviour and almost diluting it, saying: oh, no, we're just going to have the teacher deal with it. There may be cases where that is the appropriate way to deal with it, but you would not want to run the risk of somehow almost reducing the severity of the attention and the detail of the attention that should be paid to this behaviour where it is taking place.

I'm also a little bit concerned about the degree to which section 5, the bill's amendment to section 24 of the School Act, ultimately results in a lack of authority or an inadvertent reduction in authority to the teacher and the principal in that right now if there is bullying behaviour, they would under section 12 of the current act have the ability to suspend that student right away, and the current proposed amendment to section 24 would actually require them to consult with a peace officer and go through an education process and that whole thing before the child is suspended. I think that in certain cases it might actually be more appropriate for the child to be suspended. So I would want to see the teacher and/or the principal retain the discretion that currently exists in the act to deal with that appropriately.

Section 3 limits the location of bullying to various places in association with the school. That may be something that needs to happen because of jurisdictional issues, but I think it's already been noted that there is a concern with respect to cyberbullying and that if you simply limit it to school computers that are accessed through the school, you may not actually be getting at the problem because there can be rather extensive cyberbullying with a whole bunch of different pieces of technology that are not currently described in the proposed bill. For instance, the kid with the BlackBerry is BlackBerrying another kid, and there are Photoshopped pictures of a third kid all in the same classroom or right outside the school building, and it wouldn't be covered. Again, I mean, I think the intention is good there. I'm just wondering if there is ever the opportunity to redraft it so that kind of activity would actually be covered and, thus, prohibited.

Finally, I have heard from some teachers that there's a bit of concern around the notion of having . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Oh, well. Some other time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I would commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for introducing Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. Bill 210 requires an amendment to section 24 of the School Act, which currently states that a student will be suspended or expelled if their actions are physically or mentally injurious to others. The amendment would provide direction on how to handle incidents involving bullying, violence, or threatening conduct, possession of unsafe tools or devices, and the possession of drug paraphernalia.

Under this legislation all schools shall be required to address and document incidents that involve bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia or tool or device that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others. Any of these violations can result in police intervention. Local police involvement can result in a meeting with the student, parent or guardian, and school administration to discuss appropriate consequences and the next steps for the student. Under Bill 210 the police will have the discretion to lay a mandatory court summons as an optional outcome. The police will then make the appropriate recommendations to the courts that will result in consequences or conditions that are effective for both the offender and the school.

Mr. Speaker, there's a link between bullying and disposition toward violence. Family violence and bullying are clearly linked. There's a rapidly increasing base of evidence indicating a strong relationship between these two complex social issues. The similar root causes of family violence and bullying provide an exceptional opportunity to co-ordinate prevention and early intervention

responses. At the same time, while there are common ways of addressing prevention and early intervention, it is also clear that targeted and sometimes very different strategies are needed to ensure appropriate intervention, protection, and follow-up support.

Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was established in March 2007 to gather input and ideas from Albertans on ways to reduce crime, enhance community safety, and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system. According to the executive summary of the Keeping Communities Safe report, the task force had compiled the following issues as reported by Albertans.

There is a serious problem with repeat offenders. Too many of the same people are committing crimes over and over again. Repeat offenders are caught, charged, and released only to commit the same crimes again.

Secondly, not enough is being done to prevent crime. Starting young and addressing the factors that put children and youth at risk is a proven strategy and one that will have the best results in the long term. Bill 210 is in keeping with Premier Stelmach's mandate of building stronger and safer communities.

Another issue is the importance of documenting destructive behaviours and also the need to modernize the School Act with current times. Proper documentation of student behaviours and situations can assist police in doing a proper investigation. In cases where police are involved in the criminal investigation of a student, it is crucial that a detailed pattern of behaviour be presented, especially in cases of bullying or harassment. It is also important to have complete documentation in cases where police need to perform a risk assessment of a school situation or of a student to determine if there exists an immediate risk.

Bill 210 still entrusts school boards with determining policy and consequences for student behaviour. This bill works to assist each school and/or the police by providing an additional and effective tool for dealing with offending youths. Presently schools are predominantly using section 24 of the School Act. This section deals with suspensions. In some cases suspensions and/or expulsions would not be a suitable consequence to help the offending youth.

Now, some might ask, Mr. Speaker: why is the amendment proposed under the School Act and not the Criminal Code? Keeping children in school is not only important to the Education ministry but important to local authorities. The more time that children remain in school, the less likely they are to revert to less controlled environments such as streets and gangs. Criminal records are not always the answer to help a child succeed, but it is important to still hold the offending youth accountable for their actions. A criminal record can often affect one's confidence, self-esteem, and their view towards the importance of education. Bill 210 provides another option outside the Criminal Code, if necessary, to hold kids accountable for their actions yet keeps the child in school. If students are to spend time, let it be in school, not in incarceration.

Under the School Act, Mr. Speaker, it states that a student will be suspended or expelled if their actions are physically or mentally injurious to others. It could be argued that this is a reactive measure to the issue of bullying whereas Bill 210 proposes a preventative measure which more adequately addresses the issue.

3:50

Weapons are a growing concern for school communities as many have been found on students on school property. Any type of weapon on a school campus can pose a threat to the safety of its staff and students. Many weapons that youth may possess today are not considered prohibited under the Criminal Code. Many of these edged weapons can be purchased at the local hardware store and are

very sharp and harmful if used in an abusive manner. Kids are often found with weapons in schools, but it is very tough to prove the intent to use them to injure another unless they're actually caught in the act. The schools will often expel the student and move the problem to another school since this is the only available form of discipline.

This is a very well-intentioned bill whose time has come. I encourage all members to support Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. School is a place to learn, dream, and thrive. I don't know if many of us can look back to when we were children and look in the playgrounds at bands of two or three tough kids, the cool kids, walking around and beating up on somebody vulnerable, somebody who looked different, or somebody who was weak. I don't know how easy it is for these young children when they walk to school, at recess and at lunch, and when they walk home from school, a place they go to learn, when, really, all that goes through their mind is fear. Am I going to get beaten up in the playground? Am I going to get beaten up when I go home? What happens to these kids? They tell their friends, and their friends get beaten up. Then they tell their brothers or sisters, and the beatings get even worse. Then they tell their teachers. When they involve the teachers, then it becomes even worse.

Mr. Speaker, these are the scars of early childhood that influence how our children's brains develop at a very early age. Just as an emergency doctor I can tell you that where I work, I've seen countless – hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands – of our young people attempt to take their lives. Young women between the ages of 15 and 19 attempt to take their lives more than any group. Young men are successful more than any group, and they pick the most violent means. These young goons in playgrounds end up becoming young thugs and in the end criminals, and they do things a lot worse than bullying later on in life.

The objective of this bill is to promote and improve the safety of schools for our children as well as for the school staff by providing a legislative definition of bullying in the School Act along with a ban on bullying on school property. In addition, Bill 210 would prohibit the possession of drug paraphernalia or any tool or device that could potentially harm our children. Mr. Speaker, I'm astounded that we're even having this conversation on drugs and weapons and violence happening inside schools. Books and intelligence and learning and dreams belong in schools, not these things that we're talking about today.

Within this legislation all schools will be required to document incidents that involve bullying, possession of drug paraphernalia or tools or devices that can be injurious to the well-being of others. No parent wants their children to experience the degrading realities of bullying. Many students, our children, believe there is little they or anyone else can do to stop a bully. This is a reality. The reality is that sometimes the only way to stop a bully is to become a bully yourself.

As a society we have to do away with the notion that bullying is an acceptable part of growing up. There have been a number of well-documented cases where the victims of bullying have become

violent and have violently retaliated or have even taken their own life as a result. Two such examples, that are very public, of violent retaliations towards the bully or others were seen in Columbine, Colorado, and even here in Taber, Alberta. The students who committed these horrendous acts were perpetually bullied when they attended school. As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, sometimes the best way to stop a bully is to be a bully, but these were events that went way beyond reason.

Am I disturbed by how many examples exist of students who felt that their only recourse to end such torment was to end their life? Of course I am, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues in emergency rooms across the province have seen so many attempted suicides. There are 60,000 – at least 60,000 – Alberta children today who seek treatment for mental health. Is bullying one of the causes? Sure it is, whether these children are bullied in school or they're bullied at home.

I'd like to bring the Assembly's attention to the story of a bullying victim in British Columbia. In 2000 a 14-year-old girl received a phone call from another student threatening to kill her. During and after school the student was a constant victim of psychological and verbal abuse. In fear, believing no other recourse was available, she decided to end her life. The two classmates of the victim were subsequently charged with uttering threats. One was later convicted of uttering threats as well as criminal harassment. On the note left to her parents, the victim stated: If I try to get help, it'll get worse; if I ratted, they would get suspended, and there would be no stopping them. These last sentiments expressed by the student are not uncommon to those who are bullied. While recourses and avenues exist for bullied students to pursue, there's a need for additional antibullying tools such as those proposed by Bill 210. Mr. Speaker, this is just one tragic example, but as I mentioned there are many, many hundreds upon hundreds out there.

There are cases of students carrying objects intended to cause harm either to bully kids or for the purposes of protection. Many of these objects have been used to harm other children. In Airdrie there was a case of a young offender using cyberspace to threaten the safety of an area high school. The former Airdrie student wrote threatening messages in cyberspace, a tool that has become ubiquitous amongst bullies and disaffected youth. Thankfully in this case, Mr. Speaker, the offender's actions were reported before any potentially dangerous actions could be carried out. The RCMP in British Columbia became involved, and they charged the offender with uttering threats. The release conditions of the youth banned the use of computers or computer-related equipment and stated that he must be accompanied by his parents any time he leaves the home.

However, the last decade is full of examples of when the signs of bullying have gone unnoticed. The strength of Bill 210 is that it gives police the discretion to lay a mandatory court summons for severe cases of bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia or tools or devices that can be used as weapons to physically or emotionally injure the well-being of other young children in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make mention of one last incident of bullying in Red Deer. In this case the young offender was bullying a young girl as well as the girl's mother. This bully was known to throw knives and spit at the victim off the roof of her garage. This youth would also shoot his BB gun at the victim as well as threaten the victim's mother. While this didn't take place on school property, it is unlikely that these very dangerous and traumatic activities were isolated. While attending school, this youth was likely to have been involved with other incidents of bullying that other students endured. This youth's physical and mental torment demonstrates how bullying isn't just a school issue; it's a community issue.

While we have programs in our schools and our communities that

target bullying, such as those that prevent family violence or the presence of school counsellors and school resource officers, it would seem that something more is needed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 seeks to provide schools with the additional tools that they need to deal with bullying more effectively; tools that may have been able to address or even prevent these examples of bullying that I've shared with the Assembly today, not to mention the countless numbers of incidents, many of which I believe go unreported.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, by prohibiting drug paraphernalia, dangerous items on school grounds, and by defining bullying under the School Act, Bill 210 will provide schools with the ability to more easily identify and address dangerous situations. By providing the option of involving law enforcement in severe cases and allowing for disciplinary measures such as court summons or community service, I believe that Bill 210 will go a long way in changing the prevalence and effects of bullying.

A friend of mine recently said something that hit home: hurt people hurt people. This bill will in fact help to identify the bad behaviours of the bully, and in this situation this is really early intervention because these are kids that one day are going to go to jail. If they don't go to jail, eventually what goes around comes around. These bullies are going to be the object of bullying likely more severe than the bullying that they're dishing out. Even these children are our children.

Mr. Speaker, it's for these reasons that I'll be supporting Bill 210. I look forward to hearing from the rest of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. As a former school board trustee, an active community organizer, and a social worker for more than 25 years I'm pleased to say that our government is committed to promoting strong and vibrant communities. In my view, specifically, our communities must be respectful and inclusive so that we have strong and vibrant communities where all Albertans feel safe and belong.

Bill 210 actively promotes this goal by targeting what some may consider the root cause of many forms of social violence, school bullying. Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 proposes to extend the tools of educators and police officers, providing more ways to address schoolyard bullying more effectively. In addition, Bill 210 would require full documentation of all bullying incidents as well as grant police the discretion to summon bullies to court.

While these initiatives are well targeted, I feel the strength of this bill is how it addresses the evolution of bullying. When I think of bullying, I envision physical violence, name-calling from school hallways to classrooms. Seldom do I think of Internet chat rooms, text messaging, and e-mail. The sad reality is, however, that bullying has become well adapted to the information age. Using sites such as Facebook and MySpace, bullies engage in harmful behaviours such as spreading hurtful stories, engaging in name-calling, or even making personal threats on others' safety. The Internet removes the human face from personal interactions. Individuals do not see the harm their words or actions inflict. Individuals who would otherwise be restrained from bullying can become empowered by their online anonymity. Technology shields bullies from the deep emotional harm they cause while offering no such protection to the victim.

Adding to this shield of protection, cyberbullying also dramatically expands the scope of public ridicule. Simply put, online bullying exposes the victim to the criticisms of the cyberworld. Clearly, Bill 210 does not attempt to control the entire cyberworld – that would be impossible – but it does ban bullying on all school computers and intranets, and while the methods of bullying may have a broader scope, the beginnings of bullying often remain the same, schoolyards. Mr. Speaker, the advantage of Bill 210 is that it grants teachers and police the power to intervene more effectively in cases of bullying starting in the schoolyard. If cases of bullying can be identified and addressed in the schoolyard, hopefully cyberbullying might be stopped even before it begins.

Cyberbullying is only one example of how bullying has evolved in the information age, and while the clicks of a mouse can spread hate and intolerance, they pale in comparison to the gut-wrenching shots of a gun. We only need to look at the tragedies of Columbine and Taber to find sober reminders of why bullying, isolation, and hate cannot be tolerated in our schools.

Bullying and acts of intimidation leave long-term emotional scars in the victims. Bullying and physical threats instill fear in their victims, and people who fear for their safety will take steps to protect themselves. Increasingly this protection is taking the form of the use of weapons. Weapons and weapons violence in schools is related to bullying and is an issue that must be addressed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 is designed to help stop bullying before it escalates into violence involving weapons.

Victims of bullying need to feel as though there are effective solutions in place to justify coming to teachers for help. Current punishments such as detention, suspension, and expulsion may not be effective enough in deterring the most hurtful forms of bullying. With Bill 210's amendment teachers would be able to call police to meetings with the students and their guardians. With these bans in place teachers and police officers would be given the power to confront the student more effectively. The earlier an authority figure can confront and intervene in a case of bullying, the greater the chance that use of a weapon can be avoided. Bullying in schools is not a new phenomenon, but the methods of bullying have adapted themselves to the information age. Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 intends to offer a more effective antibullying proposal because it addresses these adaptations.

In closing, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and join the debate and to speak in support of Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I would sincerely like to thank the hon. member for her tireless efforts in this area to improve the safety and security of our communities right across this province.

Bill 210 addresses the important issue of bullying. Bullying directly contravenes the peaceful and respectful environment in our schools and, indeed, our society, Mr. Speaker. While the problem is multifaceted, the fact remains that bullying is malicious and very pervasive. Bill 210 would provide teachers and other school staff with an alternative tool for dealing with bullies that includes police intervention in severe cases. This bill would allow for the principal of a school to consult with a police officer at his or her discretion. The officer could in turn consult with the student, the student's parents, and the principal to establish appropriate measures for dealing with that student.

It's sad to say, but this is very needed in our schools. A positive atmosphere within the classroom is a prerequisite not only for the quality education we seek to provide but also for the safety, mental health, and effective school integration of our children as they develop and become contributing members of our society.

Mr. Speaker, while there has been much attention paid to the effects that bullies have on other students, I wish to also emphasize their effect on teachers and administration and the far-reaching consequences for the institution of education. Teaching, one of the oldest professions, is integral to the functioning of any society. Within Alberta teachers are recognized as people who play an important and pivotal role in the life of every child. I'm very pleased to say that to this day I meet many people who speak fondly of the positive impact that my parents had on their lives. My parents were elementary schoolteachers who immigrated to this country in the mid-1960s, and some 40 years later I'm still speaking to people who say that these teachers had a profound impact on them as a guiding force in their lives and in who they have become today.

4:10

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that at times a teacher's job is not easy. I listened to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, a teacher for many years, when she talked about some of the challenges in her comments earlier. Oftentimes they work in a diverse classroom where each student presents a unique set of circumstances. With this high degree of diversity it takes an enormous amount of attention and effort to keep a classroom productive and on track.

When bullying problems arise, Mr. Speaker, teachers work to resolve the issues as effectively as they can, but it takes away from the time they could be using to carry on the valuable job that they have to do. I would suggest that any time teachers have to take time away from the job that they're supposed to do is, frankly, time that is lost forever to the very young people that they are charged to serve. As they do this, they take the student aside and discuss their actions, perhaps learning of problems at home that might be causing some distress to the individual and thereby motivating their actions to a certain extent.

However, Mr. Speaker, if and when the bullying is severe, teachers are put in a tremendously difficult position where they lack the resources to effectively deal with what in many cases are serious threats to themselves as well as their students. I need only point to the very unfortunate incidents – and I'm pleased to say that they don't happen here as much but not to suggest that they couldn't – we've seen, in many cases with our neighbours to the south, where children come to school with guns in their bags or in their clothing and are certainly providing a significant danger not only to the teacher themselves and the other students but to everyone in that environment.

In severe bullying cases, Mr. Speaker, the student may not be receptive to the teacher or administration at all. They may instead act defiantly and lash out further and, of course, endanger everyone around them. In the worst cases they may threaten the teacher directly. When it comes to severe bullying, where weapons and gang involvement can be suspected, the teacher very much has a cause for serious concern.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, teachers may even become the direct target of the bully in the school or outside the school, where in some cases their personal property may be targeted: vandalism to a car, a home, even attacking the children of those very teachers. Unsolicited and threatening encounters with the problem student after school hours may also occur. Even if they disclose the issue to the administration, there may be a clear path of action, and

schools may choose to simply tolerate it or suspend the student. In either case the bullying is likely to continue and drag everyone down, miring everyone in this morass of behaviour, of stress, of ongoing problems.

Expulsion is an option, Mr. Speaker, but as the bully's actions are not necessarily contained in the classroom, the threat of being moved to another school may not solve the problem. Even in the event of the parents being contacted, the student may continue to threaten other students and teachers. Sad to say, in many cases the home environment from where these children come can typically be a precursor to the type of behaviour that these children take with them and display in the classroom.

This is where Bill 210 could help. It would give teachers a valuable resource in these severe cases. As it is, Mr. Speaker, it is understandable that teachers may be reluctant to confront a bully that is making serious threats in the first place, fearing that the situation may escalate. This could ultimately perpetuate the behaviour. If a teacher is reluctant to speak out because they, too, are fearful of the bully, then that bully has been successful in establishing a level of control over the very person that is charged with keeping control of the situation, the teacher. As you can imagine, this can seriously disrupt the foundation of a classroom and the school.

All together, Mr. Speaker, these aforementioned factors can cause significant undue pressure for teachers and the administration, negatively impacting their focus, their relationship with their students, ultimately straining their ability to maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. When a teacher's focus and ability to work productively in a classroom are compromised, the learning atmosphere suffers. This loss of progress, which is likely to be extremely difficult to quantify, can perhaps go unnoticed but, nonetheless, presents a cause for great concern.

Furthermore, in the long term some schools may develop a stigma that makes it harder for them to attract good teachers where we may need them the most. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, in many cases parents may keep their children away from some of these schools, thereby affecting the ability of the schools to deliver programming consistently across the spectrum. When teachers are passionate about their career but begin to feel constrained by such problems in the classroom, there's a clear need for action.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to further debate on this bill. I encourage all hon. members from both sides of the House to support this very valuable initiative.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, indeed, a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bill 210 works toward maintaining the safety and security of our schools. It aims to accomplish this goal by mandating documentation of students' actions, by defining which actions are considered inappropriate, and by giving schools the tools to deal with difficult situations.

As a former teacher my experience disposes me to be particularly supportive of any additional tools provided to schools by allowing police intervention and consultation when dealing with serious situations such as bullying. Mr. Speaker, bullying has evolved. It can be more aggressive or use new mediums like the Internet. In fact, we have heard how destructive this kind of medium can be to students by anyone. We all want to ensure that Bill 210 would allow our disciplinary measures to evolve similarly in school environments.

Bill 210 accounts for the fact that one type of recourse is not suitable for every student who bullies. Mr. Speaker, kids experiment, some simply for the sake of experience. For many of these students time outs or being sent to the principal's office can be very effective. For others, however, it may not be. If these students remain unco-operative and their indiscretions become severe, teachers and principals have few options with the exception of suspension and, in extreme cases, expulsion to compel their students to behave appropriately. These measures, however, are a last resort. Even then, they do not effectively address the issue.

While these penalties send a message to a student, a message that this behaviour will not be tolerated, the consequence can just as easily be spun into a reward of sorts for a student who has a limited desire to attend school in the first place. I fear that sometimes these are not really punitive measures for the student. Further, it is likely that these students who are already misbehaving will simply find peers outside of the school who facilitate their negative behaviours. This may in the end heighten the draw to skip class, a result that completely counteracts the initial goal, which is to motivate the student to attend school, to behave more appropriately, and to improve performance. The fact is that as soon as the student is off school property, staff are unable to observe and assist them in any way, which can be in the end counterproductive.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, an article published in the *Globe and Mail* addressed the issue of expelling and moving students to new schools. The article draws attention to the fact that students who have a disposition to violent behaviour are highly likely to find new conflicts in the new environment in which they are placed. School resource officers have said that in the case of students who are drug trafficking, a school transfer may simply mean a whole new clientele. Often these students face multiple expulsions until they end up on the street, and then the issue is one of community safety and, of course, gangs. Sometimes they will simply drop out before disciplinary measures force them to do so. It has been shown that schools that issue more suspensions have higher dropout rates, a vicious circle. This makes for a tough balance for school staff and school boards. They have to seriously consider, when contemplating suspension and expulsion, what is best for the student who has misbehaved and what is best for the school environment.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 creates a new way to manage bullying behaviour, one that has a renewed sense of promise. By requiring the documentation of these behaviours, students are being held accountable for their actions, something which needs to be impressed upon them. Mistakes made by students will not simply be forgotten, something which a lot of students believe gets forgotten. In cases where the behaviour is repetitive, these records can be accessed to show ongoing or escalating behaviour. This is a powerful message.

This bill will provide an alternative to a traditional school suspension or expulsion. By bringing together the principal, the parents, the student, and the police to discuss an appropriate and effective course of action for serious bullying, it will convey the message that bullying will not be tolerated. Psychologically these students need support, and an expulsion does not provide that support. Suspension or expulsion is unlikely to motivate change. That is why these alternatives are crucial. Keeping children in school is important to this government, to the Department of Education, to local authorities, to the police, and, of course, to parents and communities.

Bill 210 would provide the needed tools to address bullying and will provide students with the opportunity to recognize and change

their behaviour patterns. Mr. Speaker, speaking as a former teacher, I stand before this Assembly to fully support Bill 210.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. I must confess that I did not have any prepared notes when I came in here today, but having reviewed the bill on a cursory basis, this is definitely something we want to proceed with. Bullying of all kinds, of course, is unacceptable, and I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her efforts in this and other like-minded efforts.

Speaking as someone who has a rather diverse background in education – I attended private, separate, and public schools – I've seen a large variety of situations. My mother has been a teacher for 33 years and comes from a long line of teachers in her family, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that one thing that stands out in my mind is that when I was about 16 years old, she came home and told me that a student had physically attacked her. Later, unfortunately, this led to her deciding: you know, I want to move on in my career. She didn't feel that anybody was supporting her there. She didn't feel that the system was doing anything. This is something that we also have to consider when we look at this type of legislation. Our teachers are people that make many sacrifices to educate the next generation, our children, and we have to protect them adequately.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity made some commentary regarding some slurs, which I won't repeat. I definitely agree with him that these types of slurs are completely unacceptable. I think he's got a great point there. That being said, I do think a positive development is that in recent years, at least in my own social circle, I have seen a drastic decline in the amount of these comments, obviously a positive development moving forward. That being said, we should not think that this legislation is something that we should discount or move aside or that it's not necessary simply because of these positive social developments that I mentioned.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I haven't been fortunate enough to be blessed with children myself, but one thing that we have to consider in this legislation is that we must think of bullying through the eyes of a child. What may seem trivial to us as adults may in fact be catastrophic to children, especially young children. That may have a long-lasting impact on their lives. In fact, many children may not wish to report bullying to a teacher for fear of further reprisal from the people that he or she is being bullied by. This is hardly something that we want to teach our children, that when there's a problem, we can't go to the authorities. Again, this legislation works towards mending that gap.

Bullying can also have far-reaching effects on the rest of the lives of children. Many bullied children, as my mother told me many years ago, do not wish to complete their education. I remember the story of one such student who had been bullied but kept on going to school regardless, but it was difficult.

Bullies are often, of course, a symptom of a problem at home. There could be a cycle of abuse that continues. Bullies often continue after graduating school, if they do, in the workplace. Unfortunately, I've had the displeasure of working with some in my past career. Bullies, of course, can often go into crime. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we must address these issues as early in the cycle as possible. That's what this legislation goes to address.

A lot of speakers today, Mr. Speaker, have talked about the emotional cost of bullying, but we also must consider the financial cost of not acting. Yes, it may cost a little bit more to police or enact

this act, but also consider the lost productivity of bullying and the effect that it has on people not only in schools but also later in the workplace. We also have to consider the cost and externalities of bullies who turn to crime early and later in life and often can have a lifetime of crime.

In conclusion, my submission to the House, Mr. Speaker, is that we want to do what we can to nip bullying in the bud as much as possible. I once again commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for presenting this bill, and I urge all members to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise today to speak at second reading of Bill 210, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. First of all, I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forth this bill and for her sincere attempt to protect our children, who are the most important commodity we have.

Many of my colleagues today have referred to an incident in Taber which happened a few years ago in the local high school. The incident may have been a result of bullying or emotional abuse. As a representative from that community I'm happy to rise to speak in support of this legislation today.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges facing our schools are becoming increasingly more sophisticated. Drug use coupled with bullying and violence threaten to compromise the safe learning environments our schools strive to maintain. Bill 210 provides substantive measures in addressing these challenges by banning drug paraphernalia as well as providing novel disciplinary measures that could prevent major problems before they occur.

Mr. Speaker, these potential problems, I believe, are best understood by school resource officers. School resource officers are regular uniformed police officers that work in our schools policing, protecting, and mentoring students. They inform students about drugs and related topics. They act as counsellors, and they provide support to students in need. The relationship they develop with students allows for a greater awareness of what is going on in schools in terms of potentially threatening and/or illegal activities. By developing relationships with students, these school resource officers are able to gain valuable knowledge that could lead to the prevention of potentially dangerous situations. It is also typically our school resource officers who report some disconcerting trends within our schools.

Increasingly our schools are seeing cases of not just bullying among students but incidents involving drugs. Mr. Speaker, I consider this a threat to a school's safe learning environment. Bill 210 would commendably outlaw the possession of drug paraphernalia on school property. Some pieces of drug paraphernalia today would not look out of place on your kitchen counter or coffee table. Pens, pop cans, bottles, cutlery, paper folds, portable scales, and many other everyday objects now pass for drug-related equipment. For example, a particularly dangerous piece of drug paraphernalia is the screw cap of a broken light bulb. This can be used in the process of making crystal meth. Mr. Speaker, it is also dangerous because it could be used as a weapon. This illustrates the potential linkage between drug paraphernalia and violence.

4:30

School resource officers are the people who deal with these cases on a daily basis. At present possession of drug paraphernalia is not directly an indictable offence. Drug paraphernalia can be used as

evidence in the case of a trafficking charge, but as I alluded to earlier, it's difficult to prove that a pop can, for example, is intended for drug use.

The inability to effectively deal with the possession of drug paraphernalia has resulted in numerous serious and potentially dangerous situations. An incident last year nearly resulted in the death of a student, a potential death that could have been prevented. In this incident a female student at a particular school was frequently found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia. Although she had been repeatedly suspended, she continued to possess the items. The girl, after returning to school, talked another female classmate into smoking marijuana. This other girl was not known to have ever experimented with drugs. Soon after, the female classmate who smoked the drug became gravely ill, and an ambulance was called in. Because of the urgency of the situation the girl who provided her female classmate with the drugs admitted to the police and medical personnel what she gave to her female classmate. The girl nearly died from smoking impure marijuana that was provided to her by the girl who was repeatedly caught with drug paraphernalia.

This, Mr. Speaker, I believe illustrates how further disciplinary measures as well as a ban on drug paraphernalia are necessary to intervene in situations such as this. It is concerning that a situation like this can even develop in our schools, that even though someone is repeatedly found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia, our school resource officers may not be able to effectively address the situation and prevent future problems. I believe that possession of drug paraphernalia is not only an obvious indication of drug use with a particular student; it can be an indication of a safety issue that affects the entire school.

Bill 210 recognizes the role that drug paraphernalia plays in the overall drug culture. This, Mr. Speaker, is the culture that threatens the safe learning environment that our schools work towards. Regardless of the intent of these possessions Alberta students and school staff are better off without these objects in our schools. By implementing Bill 210 resource officers and staff would have another tool to eliminate drug paraphernalia in schools.

Mr. Speaker, this ban may not solve all drug-related challenges, and it is not likely that it would solve all bullying-related charges either. However, the measures proposed in Bill 210 would be a valuable tool that may help prevent many serious situations. Therefore, I fully endorse the intent and focus of this bill.

Although I do not have the ability to say that I was ever a teacher or have some other of the characteristics that have been used today to support this bill, I will say that probably my only qualifications are as a parent, grandparent, and a friend of children. There are many things that make me angry, but probably the thing that makes me the most angry is to see children abused or misused or hurt. Therefore, I will support this bill because I believe it's a bill that would help our children have a safer learning experience and would be welcomed by many Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to rise in support of the very hard work that's been done by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This member, as the House will know, is the chair of the safe communities task force, which provided a report to the government of Alberta last November with respect to safe communities, and I think that this work and this bill is another indication of the deep understanding and commitment that the member has to making Alberta a safer place.

It has been very interesting to work with respect to safe communities and to talk about the number of elements of our community that can be impacted by violence and by the unsettling of social cohesion. I think it is certainly the case – and it has been very well identified in this bill – that we must protect our children. We must ensure that when our children are young, as my daughter is, we are able to create environments where they are able to learn and to grow and to thrive. It's a very important part of what we need to do as a government and as a province to take care of our children. As we know, violence begets violence. We've heard a number of variations of that today. We know that people can be very harmful.

I'd like to introduce another perspective on this issue which is probably something that we also need to consider, which is that very often when we're talking about children who are bullies, they have learned that behaviour somewhere. They have learned somewhere that violence will get a reaction. Maybe in their own personal situations, maybe not all situations but some situations, they have at least witnessed violence, maybe have been victims of violence themselves at a very young age. So the other opportunity for this bill, Mr. Speaker, in the way that the hon. member has drafted this, is to not only punish bullies but to intervene, in a way, in partnership with schools and with principals and with police officers who are engaged in this, to try to identify where we might be able to help kids that have been victimized, whether it's at home or at school. I commend the member on that because it has been a very important part of what she has talked about with respect to this bill.

We know that when we talk about destructive behaviour and violence, we're talking about issues around self-esteem. I believe, from listening to the conversations in the House today, that people understand that from a very early age if a child's self-esteem is adversely impacted, it is very likely that there will be ongoing social concerns that we will have to deal with. Those may take the form of children getting involved in crime. They may take the form of self-destructive behaviour. We may see children who don't turn into bullies themselves but end up getting involved in drinking or perhaps the use of drugs, which as we know from all of the discussion that we've had in the House in this past year with respect to safe communities, brings over a period of time a tremendous number of challenges for government and for the community to have to deal with. We know that it's a cost to our children. We know that it results in a cost to our families and it results in a number of costs to our community.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Today as we look at safe communities work, whether we're talking about doing that work in Education or Health or with respect to Children and Youth Services, we are looking to try to better the environment that children are growing up in so that we're not dealing at a later date with the long-term impact of these issues. I think that bullying and violence in schools has been something that we need to address in a way that is constructive and that gives help to children.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that in many of the discussions that I've been privileged to be a part of around this province in the past six or seven months, it has been very encouraging for me to have discussions with chiefs of police and with police officers that are involved in this work. I know that the hon. member has worked very closely with police officers that are involved in communities and schools around this province with respect to this issue, and I just want to pay tribute to police officers, who are doing so much more than what we traditionally think of in terms of that spectrum of enforcement and prosecution of crime.

It has been very interesting for me in a number of conversations to be able to talk to people that are active in police services, who really understand that in order to get to the root of later social problems that ultimately result in crime and issues that we have to deal with, they want to be part of trying to solve the problems at the front end of that. That might mean school resource officers. I know that in Edmonton, Calgary, and a number of communities around the province there are school resource officers working very closely with people that are leaders in the school community. It could be the child and family response teams that we've seen.

The most important thing is that whatever we call these groups, what we're seeing is a community fully engaged in trying to address the needs of a number of children. Whether those are children who are victims of bullying in a school or whether they are children who perhaps are involved in perpetrating this violence, the most important thing is that we as a government and, I think, we as parents and community have a responsibility to intervene and try to find a way to say: look, if this is happening, then we must stop it, and we must stop it because it has come from something else. If we can start to look at it from that perspective and at a very early time pay attention to the underlying foundations of how our children are feeling when they're growing up, I think it will reap tremendous benefits in the long term.

I know that there is much support in this House for this bill. I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward, and I certainly encourage people to support it.

4:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bullying in all its forms has no place in our schools, whether it's directed towards other children or towards teachers and staff. That's why I thank the hon. member for bringing forward Bill 210.

We've seen this government take initiative to address the significant psychological and sometimes physical toll bullying takes on students. Bill 210 intends to further address this by amending the School Act to provide options to school staff when handling incidents involving bullying, violence, or threatening conduct, possession of unsafe tools or devices, and the possessions of drug paraphernalia.

With Bill 210 schools will be required to document all incidents that involve bullying and violations and would have the additional tool of requesting police intervention at their disposal. In addition, police will have the discretion to lay a mandatory court summons. Today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the initiatives that have already been established to address this issue and how Bill 210 could help address bullying in the future.

One of the first initiatives began in October 2003 with the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, which brought together stakeholders and communities to recommend solutions to the problem of family violence and bullying. On May 7, 2004, after seven months of public consultation with 3,000 Albertans, the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was held in Calgary. The 24th recommendation of the report suggests that government work to "ensure that all schools encourage positive attitudes, good behaviour and respect for others."

Following this, the government undertook an aggressive online educational campaign to raise awareness of bullying, launching three

individual websites, each uniquely targeted to children, youth, and adults. The first, www.teamheroes.ca, which is targeted at children aged three to 11, chronicles the adventures of a group of young elementary students and their teacher, together known as the S-team, who are dedicated to the prevention of bullying. Kids can log on to this site and, through a series of interactive online games, direct the members of this heroic group through scenarios where bullying is involved. From name-calling to physical bullying it's up to the player to find the best way to respond to each situation. The site also provides downloadable desktop wallpaper, contests, and useful information and tips for children when they find themselves or other students being bullied.

The second website, www.b-free.ca, was uniquely developed for youth by youth. It provides useful information on bullying in its many forms, including physical, social, cyber, and verbal and how to respond to such situations, including comprehensive resources for cyberbullying and homophobic bullying. Mr. Speaker, sharing bullying experiences can provide relief to youth who face bullying and reassure them that they are not alone and that bullying is unacceptable under any circumstances. It also provides guidelines on how to cope with bullying and how to prevent it rather than facilitate it. To this end, b-free.ca has a section dedicated to inspirational stories from other youth as well as famous celebrities such as actor Pierce Brosnan and singer Chester Bennington of the alternative rock band, Linkin Park.

Mr. Speaker, the third site, www.bullyfreealberta.ca, provides tools for parents to prevent or intervene in situations of bullying. This site provides several concise, easy-to-read fact sheets on numerous forms of bullying, including homophobic, sports-related, and cyber-related. In addition to these sites, the government also maintains a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week bullying prevention helpline to assist victims of bullying.

Mr. Speaker, these tools are all resourceful for the individuals that are aware of bullying and wish to increase their understanding of the issue. As many of us know, one of the most important steps of change is creating awareness. This government, Mr. Speaker, has recognized this, demonstrating its support by participating in National Bullying Awareness Week, which actually took place a couple of weeks ago, from November 16 to 22. It's now in its sixth year. National Bullying Awareness Week has crossed borders to other countries and actually began here in Canada as a grassroots movement. The program, which seeks to prevent bullying through education and raising awareness, is supported by the Family Channel, which facilitates a comprehensive advertising campaign.

Further to this initiative, Mr. Speaker, in 2007 the government of Alberta established and implemented an independent awareness campaign developed with the Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee, a committee that consists of youth from all across Alberta. The Reverse It, Be Better than Bullying campaign is an aggressive media and advertising strategy to raise awareness of bullying. It consisted of theatre advertisement on 246 Cineplex Odeon screens, advertising in theatre lobbies and washrooms, and posters in schools, libraries, and sports and recreation facilities. Part of this initiative also provides teachers in all school jurisdictions with access to free training resources to be used to address cyberbullying. More recently the government established a partnership with Global Television that will see antibullying ads on television and radio, in print, and online.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the resources that this government has provided to educators, parents, youth, and children to prevent and reduce the incidence of bullying. By visiting these websites, students become educated on bullying, gain awareness of their

rights, and may persuade those who bully other students to stop. Bill 210 goes further to protect victims of bullying by providing legislative definitions of bullying and weapons as well as providing an alternate enforcement mechanism. Documentation of all incidents of bullying and the possibility of police intervention following severe indiscretions would complement the initiatives that this government has already taken to raise awareness around the issues of school bullying.

Mr. Speaker, on a personal note, I have a son in grade 6, so I have the opportunity to talk to many parents. We're all concerned about the safety and security of our children, and this bill would improve both. I urge all members here today to support Bill 210.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to join so many colleagues in rising to speak in favour of Bill 210, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008. I'd like to join with other members, particularly the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, in congratulating the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward. I think it's important not only because of the provisions in this particular bill but the very broad experience and broad knowledge base that the member has in issues as they relate to safe communities. I think that broad perspective is well reflected in the specific provisions of the bill.

The bill's amendment that all schools will be required to address and document incidents involving bullying or possession of any drug paraphernalia, tool, or device that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others is a major step in properly addressing bullying and other problems in our schools. I think, Mr. Speaker, it also enhances a lot of the work that has been done at the community level and also in policy direction set by government to support students who are experiencing problems in school, many of which are a consequence of bullying. I think it provides that enhancement by for the first time providing some real accountability at the student level for the behaviour that can be the root of so many of these other problems experienced by students in our schools today. That accountability has not been something that we've seen before.

I think the provisions in this bill set out a fair, manageable, and responsible approach to documenting these activities and, in doing so, provide an example to all that this sort of behaviour has very negative consequences, and with it the person perpetrating the bullying behaviour carries a responsibility not only to the individual students affected but to the school and, indeed, the community as a whole. The fact that the provisions of the bill can result in police intervention means that there are more resources and channels for schools that will result in serious consequences and, in turn, will turn attention to other problems in the school, giving students and teachers and the community an opportunity to solve them collectively. A mandatory court summons, if necessary, providing that students will be aware of a serious, concrete result for extreme situations of misbehaviour is, indeed, in order and should be codified in statute in our province.

4:50

The bill is also about addressing youth behavioural problems before they become a habit and swell into greater problems or criminal activity on a grander scale. By targeting those students that create problems in schools, we will hopefully see our schools work together to address and stop serious behavioural problems that

manifest themselves as adult offences, also as incidents of mental illness in the community, escalation of gang activity, and so many other issues that we're dealing with in our quest to make our communities safe.

The bill is not only about students creating individual problems. For students that are the victims of bullying in our schools, the bill provides an assurance that we care about their safety and that we do not tolerate the behaviour that has affected them in the school environment. Since much of the bullying is done by the same individual or persons on a repeated basis, increased documentation of these events will ensure that there is always proper tracking of incidents of bullying and will provide a record of our schools' and our communities' response to this behaviour. This means that we will be able to provide much better information to police and other resource providers in the community, to provide them with the most accurate portrayal possible of what is taking place in an individual school so that they have an opportunity to properly address the total situation.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General in her remarks referred to some of the innovative initiatives that have been instituted in schools, things that are sometimes called wraparound services, Mr. Speaker. The availability of school resource officers, the on-site services of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, on-site mental health services, and so much more have now been made available in many communities across Alberta to create a positive learning environment and to cope in some ways, I would suspect, with the consequences of bullying for those students who have been unfortunate enough to be the victim of it. As I said earlier, the opportunity to introduce some direct behavioural accountability for those students in schools who would seek to undermine the progress that's being made as a result of the investment in those sorts of initiatives would seem to me to be a welcome tool and one that will only enhance the good work that we're doing in other areas.

While most schools currently use suspension or expulsion as the final consequence in dealing with problems in their schools, this bill will ensure that schools have other channels to use for those situations where suspension or expulsion is not the proper action and, of course, Mr. Speaker, does nothing to further the learning opportunities for the particular student who is the offender. The bill is not meant to give children a criminal record, as has been stated earlier. It is also not meant to keep offending students out of school on a permanent basis. What it is meant to do is ensure students are held accountable for their actions.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I'd now invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close the debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In closing, I want to thank my colleagues for their participation in the debate. I appreciate the comments from the opposition, and I want to reiterate that in no way did I want to leave out sexual orientation or children with disabilities.

I want to thank two special police officers from Edmonton, Sergeant Tom Farquhar and Constable Alfred Ma, who have helped work long and hard with me on Bill 210. Their expertise and their knowledge has been so valuable. Mr. Speaker, I believe that they are in the gallery, so thank you, guys.

Mr. Speaker, if we can save one child the torment and heartache of being bullied, then this Assembly will have done something very positive. I encourage all members to support Bill 210. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

Bill 211**Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act**

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to begin debate on Bill 211, the Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act. The purpose of Bill 211 is to establish a standard for the documentation of child access exchange in cases of separation or divorce. This documentation would serve as a device that could be relied upon by the provincial court or Court of Queen's Bench as third-party confirmation to determine if child access orders are being followed. The goal of this legislation is to help ensure that child access orders are followed appropriately by parents following a divorce or separation.

Mr. Speaker, the number of lone-parent families in Alberta in 2005 was approximately 140,000, affecting nearly 220,000 Alberta children. Of these 220,000 children in lone-parent families only about 50 per cent of children have access to their noncustodial parent after five years have elapsed. Part of this reason is due to the failure of one parent to get the court-ordered access to their children. Ultimately, a parent who is repeatedly denied court-ordered access from the other parent can become frustrated and impoverished by the ensuing legal proceedings, high fees, and lengthy waiting period for these proceedings. This frustration leads to a gradual and in some cases complete exclusion from the lives of their children.

Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity to speak to certain men's groups about these difficulties in ensuring access to their children following divorce, and there are several of them up in the gallery today. I strongly believe that the measures indicated in Bill 211 would be a helpful way to address these concerns so that more parents successfully remain active in their children's lives.

Statistically children of divorced families face greater challenges throughout their youth and into adulthood, but studies have shown that this is not due to the divorce but from the lack of both parents continuing to be involved in their upbringing. Children from divorced households are estimated to have a two and a half times greater chance of acquiring significant psychological and social problems than those of nondivorced households. However, statistics are nearly similar for the children whose separated parents remained actively involved in their lives. Academic achievement also improves when parents remain actively involved in their children's lives. In fact, children posted higher academic scores when their fathers maintained a close relationship, visited frequently, and continued to help with the homework.

However, Mr. Speaker, this is not to say that there are not single parents who are excellent parents. In fact, Michael Phelps, a role model for children worldwide who recently inspired the world by capturing eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, was raised solely by his mother, Debbie. But for a majority of those 220,000 children a meaningful relationship with both parents can heavily reduce the short-term and long-term psychological effects that divorce imposes. Ensuring that access is enforced is a key element to providing this meaningful and positive relationship.

Mr. Speaker, following divorce, parents are required to attend a course that provides education on proper parenting following divorce. Through measures such as these this government hopes to better equip parents with the knowledge to ensure a stable transition to a new life with new realities and to prevent future disputes and conflict. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, disputes over child access do occur. These disputes may continue for an extended period of time and require significant financial resources of parents and in some cases the government.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Bill 211 would provide an additional tool to parents and the courts to ensure that child access is enforced. I'd like to demonstrate how this would work. A parent who finds himself or herself unable to receive the designated access to their child may request the service of a recorder through a court order. A recorder would document the place and time a child would be exchanged and the person who arrived with the child and the person who departed with the child. Furthermore, the recorder would document any other information that's required to be provided by the court, an agreement with the recorder, or as set up by the Minister of Justice. The document of this exchange would be admissible as evidence in judicial proceedings in case of dispute between two parents regarding child access and exchange.

In addition, parents would provide the financial resources to utilize this service. This would serve as an additional incentive for parents to resolve child access disputes in a timely manner. The exchange of children would be conducted at designated locations as approved by the Minister of Justice and could include a local church, a local school, a YMCA, or perhaps a boys' and girls' club.

Mr. Speaker, this government already provides services for child exchange with a suspected risk of violence; however, Bill 211 provides a tool to address the majority of divorces that do not necessarily include violence and serves as a preventative measure in numerous ways. First, this bill would change the habits of parents who deny access and also encourage neglectful parents to fulfill their parental responsibilities. Finally, if parents were to proceed to court, documentation would alleviate pressure on the legal system by providing a standard legal document with the time and date a child was exchanged, providing clarity for the court as to what action should be taken.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to address the well-being of children following divorce and how this government can increase the number of children who have access to both parents.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the opposition critic for Children and Youth Services, while I support the intent of Bill 211, Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act, it's too little, and it's too late. It's too late in the sense that had this been done starting last November with my Motion 511 calling for a unified family court process, this type of action would have already been in place. It's too late also in the sense that we are only going to have this second reading opportunity to discuss this bill. It will not be enacted. It may be brought forward in a different format in the spring, with luck, but it's certainly not going to now or in the near future help out families.

Concerns I have with regard to Bill 211, Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act, are that this service should already be provided because this would give structure and provide official records in contentious custody cases. The fact that this documentation doesn't currently exist should be considered extremely troubling. This service may have the effect of reducing tension and disruption to families that are going through custody disputes and would give each party an official document that they would be able to use as admissible evidence in future court proceedings.

Questions come as to who's footing the bill. Often single parents with custody of children are very likely to be living in poverty. If this is a service that is to be paid for by the parents or the guardians, how will it be determined who pays? I've already outlined in detail and will not repeat how a family suffering a custody battle has

already paid out \$255,000 and has been denied guardianship that their daughter requested of their two young grandchildren. They've been through 43 different court appearances, they've gone through seven different judges, and it remains unresolved. Why didn't this process happen for them at the very beginning? Possibly they would not be in this place or at this expense. For every one of those \$255,000 that they paid out, the Alberta taxpayer is on the hook for an equal sum in terms of the prosecution, the cost of the judge, and the cost of the court procedures.

While this has good intentions, it's very late in coming. Will there be a subsidy for parents or guardians who cannot afford the service but would benefit from it? How will the ministry determine who has the ability to apply for this service?

I don't know how many members have had a chance to sit in a children and youth court and see the anguish first-hand of parents and grandparents trying to get back visitation rights, never mind custody, of their child. The circumstances under which children are removed from their homes as opposed to being supported within their homes by Children and Youth Services are absolutely deplorable. The younger the child, the faster tracked they are from fostering to adoption. The family from which the child was torn has very little opportunity and very little support to regain access to the child or to prove that they are worthy of continuing the parenting of that child.

The case for grandparents is as exhausting and as saddening as is the case for parents. In situations that I've dealt with in my constituency, grandparents who themselves have been foster parents have been denied the opportunity to serve as surrogate kin care providers for their own children.

Bill 211, Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act, if it ever sees the light of legislative day, could potentially resolve a circumstance by adding to the evidence that is provided in court. Had we had a unified family court process, as was unanimously agreed to last November by this Legislature, the divorce rulings, which the federal government has the authority over, would have been connected with the Children and Youth Services aspects, where provincial courts have the authority over everything except the Court of Queen's Bench authority over divorce cases. Had the provincial and the federal, the Court of Queen's Bench and our provincial court systems, been unified, as was the intent of Motion 511, then this process would have been a natural evolution of the co-ordination of those two courts. As it is, families are ping-ponged back and forth between the Court of Queen's Bench and the provincial court trying to resolve the issues of custody.

We can and we must do better in this province. It's unfortunate, as was the case with Bill 210, that we have not had the opportunity earlier to discuss Bill 211 because, even with its shortcomings as to who will pay the cost, it has potential in resolving what is a very messy circumstance when associated with divorce and child custody. Unfortunately, that opportunity will not exist today, and I do not wish to take up more time. It has good intentions, but it's not going to happen today or any time in the spring.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. I appreciate her intentions. I'm hoping that if the government is going to get behind this bill, it will appear on the spring Order Paper and we'll have a chance to vote on it and get it into action.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take a moment to introduce at least a few of the people who have come out in support of this bill. They're in the members' gallery. There's Jerry Bernard, Chris Jones, John Redwood, Melanie Greenfield, Ferrall Christensen, Wes Wojihowitz, and Jim Main, and I see that there are several others. If you could all rise, we will give you a good welcome.

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

Bill 211

Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill, Bill 211, the Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act. I'd like to commend the hon. member for this bill. We've had an opportunity to discuss this issue a number of times, and I know that she is very passionate about this. It's also wonderful to see so many people at 5:30 on a Monday afternoon who are interested in this public debate, so I commend the hon. member for the work that she has done on this.

I have to say that when I was practising law, I represented a number of times people who were involved in child custody files in the context of family breakup, which is always a very difficult situation. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that if I look back over my career, I probably represented fathers more than I represented mothers. I would say that when we look at the overall system, when we look at family law in general, there are many ways that the court needs to be able to respond to this very difficult situation of family breakup, and I have to say that the courts and people that are involved in a number of the different types of approaches that are taken in courts with respect to family law at the moment are getting better at responding to the situations that we are dealing with.

As I was saying earlier, I believe that those formative years for children from the time that they are born until they are 10 years old or so are very important in terms of a child's self-esteem and a child's self-worth. I think that wherever there are opportunities to have both parents involved in a constructive way in a child's life, it's very important that we seek opportunities to do that.

It's an important part of how the law has to evolve that we are able as a legal community, as a Department of Justice, and as a government to find different approaches that will make it more advantageous for people to be able to follow a set of rules that are not necessarily based within a structured court system to allow for access for both parents to children.

I have to say that apart from the fact that I represented many clients who were concerned about this issue and worked within the system, I've also seen from a personal experience a situation that did not go so well, and that certainly has had an impact on the children involved. It's also had an impact on the parents, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it's very important for us to talk on a very regular basis about the fact that both parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children, whether the parents are together or not, are well parented by both parents. I believe that parents have an obligation to their children to ensure that that happens.

I congratulate the hon. member for her bill today. I believe it's an important part of what we need to be doing in terms of continuing to challenge the system to ensure that as society changes and people are coming into the system and are prepared to take on their responsibilities as parents, we respect their desire to do that, whether they be mothers or fathers, but I know that we're focusing on a particular parent group today. I encourage people to support this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak in favour of Bill 211 and to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this forward. As many of us are aware, oftentimes when children are being raised by two individuals who are no longer together but are still attempting to raise children, these things become contentious. Interpretations of time and access and what really has happened are part of the human process. This bill does a lot to sort of alleviate the natural tension that sometimes arises between individuals who are, as indicated, no longer together but who are still trying to raise children in some fashion. It allows for both parents to have access to children, I would say, in a much more friendly way of creating that exchange.

If at times in the past there has been a denial of a spouse who has rightful access to a child but that hasn't happened or if at times the custody access of children by a parent hasn't gone well, this provision of a recorder looks like one of those mechanisms that can in fact ease this transition as well as serve as a record to go before a magistrate that says, "Hey, I'm not able to see my child and here are the reasons for this," and hopefully allow for parents of either gender who are having difficulties in this situation to get access to their children and continue to be involved in their lives and continue to provide the love and support that they want to.

Just one final point, and that is that I took the Member for Calgary-Varsity's comments to heart in that it's time this province moved towards a unified family court. I believe it would better serve this type of stuff, and we can go from there.

Nevertheless, it was a pleasure to speak on behalf of Bill 211. I hope it does see the light of day at some point in time, and I appreciate the hard work and effort of the hon. member on this file.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to join the debate on Bill 211, the Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing forward this bill, which seeks to establish a standard for the documentation of child exchanges in cases of separation or divorce. The documentation would be provided by an independent and accredited third-party representative, and the costs incurred would be shared by the respective guardians.

The primary intent of this bill is to increase the number of children who have access to both parents following the separation of their family. I believe that it is vital that we do everything in our power to help children have access on an ongoing basis to both parents. Mr. Speaker, this access can help facilitate a child's adjustment to changes that come with divorce. Separation and divorce can often cause considerable short-term and long-term challenges not only for the separating adults but also for the children of these families. It is very important that we continue to discuss ways to alleviate some of these challenges that these children may be faced with.

As we see the number of divorced and separated families increase, Mr. Speaker, so will the number of children who belong to lone-parent families. In the year 2000 there were over 196,000 children in lone-parent families in Alberta, and by 2005 the number had risen to over 219,000. Sad to say, this is a growth industry.

Initial stages of separation or divorce can be very stressful on children and can scar these children for many years to come, with one of the main stressors being the uncertainty of their future situation as it pertains to the relationship with their parents and their new living arrangements, Mr. Speaker. Documenting parental exchange will provide a record of the interchange that happens when parents meet and the child or children go to the other parent for the time or visitation agreed upon or that the court stipulated in the divorce. Without co-ordination, Mr. Speaker, and a willingness to co-operate by these parents children may be uncertain where they will go to school, how they will get there, and when they will get to visit the other parent.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, one way to reduce this uncertainty is by recording when one of these parents is not fulfilling their obligation concerning visitation. Too often access is used by a custodial parent to spite the noncustodial parent. In divorced or separated families parents often encounter difficulty ensuring that this access is enforced. This lack of participation leads to reduced involvement in the life of a child or in some cases a complete withdrawal, and that is to the detriment of that child and, I would add, in the long term a great detriment to society as a whole as children miss the positive guidance of one parent and often act out negatively as a result. In fact, after three years following a separation or divorce, up to 50 per cent of children no longer remain in contact with their noncustodial parent. This is a troubling trend for children in their formative years, when stability and access from both parents is essential to their psychological well-being.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 211 would provide a court recorder to document the time and place of child exchange between two parents. The appointed court recorder would provide third-party documentation of child exchanges to assist the courts as they attempt to remedy this difficult situation.

There are numerous situations where a parent does not live up to the obligations set out in the parental access orders. These situations can be very traumatic for the children and frustrating for the parents who wish to play an active role in the life of their child. Parents in these situations can apply to the courts to enforce or change access orders; however, this can be considerably difficult. As illustrated before, this can be a time-consuming and frustrating process for noncustodial parents. Without third party documentation the courts may not get an accurate picture of this situation, which can hinder their ability to remedy the situation. Bill 211 would provide the courts with an objective tool to prescribe the most effective solution to the specific situation.

Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that children receive the necessary parental supports following the divorce or the separation of their parents. These supports are best achieved by having a co-operative parenting arrangement between the two parents. Ensuring these continued parental supports for children may reduce the time necessary for them to appropriately adjust to the new situation. Bill 211 provides a significant measure that can reduce the stresses and negative impacts these situations may have on all parties. It encourages less interparental conflict, which can lead to an improved child-parent relationship.

This type of documentation is a tool for parents to help alleviate the issue of trying to find ways to prove that the expectations of

court-ordered access are not being met. It is a way to hold parents accountable for not showing up for an agreed upon visitation schedule. Documenting a parent's inability or unwillingness to participate in visitation is the first step to protecting children from instability and the psychological effects that come with being repeatedly let down.

Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 211 is well intended, and I look forward to hearing further debate. Thank you.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and continue debate on Bill 211, Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. This legislation establishes a standard for the documentation of child exchanges in cases of separation or divorce. It intends to increase the number of children that have access to both parents after a court order has been issued. Parental access can be extremely beneficial for a child to be able to cope with the psychological and physical adjustments that may result from separation. Bill 211 addresses the government's role in assisting those involved with these family matters. In doing so, this legislation enables us to discuss the current strategies already in existence to deal with parental access to children.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta already has a number of ways to deal with the outcome of familial separations in the best possible manner for all parties involved. The Family Law Act is a major piece of legislation that deals with family law matters. The act covers the roles and responsibilities of guardians, spousal and child support, and provides for contact by nonguardians. The statute encourages mediation and dispute resolution rather than bringing the matter to court. In dealing with family law matters, the Family Law Act also advances the best interests of any children involved by providing the greatest possible protection of a child's physiological, psychological, and emotional safety as well as other needs and circumstances, considering the effect of any family violence on the child and other family members, and taking into account a parent's ability to discuss and co-operate on issues affecting a child.

Through the Family Law Act the Alberta government has enacted many provisions to protect the needs of children involved in divorce or separation. Mr. Speaker, child access is granted within the Family Law Act, and serious penalties are given in the event that it is denied. Police may be asked to intervene in these situations to enforce access along with a number of other provisions that can be

made, including providing make-up visits, posting security that will be lost if they continue to deny, paying money to the parent whose parenting time has been denied, paying a penalty of \$100 per day of denied parenting time, and going to jail. While the process is undertaken in extreme examples, the Family Law Act prescribes an outline to follow and decreases the likelihood of noncompliance. Because of this act there is one less worry in the minds of families during this difficult process.

Mr. Speaker, this government provides a mechanism to handle dispute resolution between both parents rather than going through a difficult legal procedure. Through the intake and case flow management program the Alberta government helps Albertans involved in legal disputes over parenting, child visitation rights, and guardianship of children. The initiative is another method by which parents can deal with their disputes without having to go through the court process. It enables those Albertans to save both time and money that would otherwise be spent in legal fees. This program can be quite beneficial as an information resource for those who are unfamiliar with the rules and procedures of our court system. Operating in Edmonton for the past five years, the program has been very successful, with an average of 58 per cent of cases being resolved by agreement, but there are a number of situations that cannot be resolved without involving the authorities. Third-party intervention in these situations may be deemed necessary.

Mr. Speaker, this government currently facilitates a province-wide operation to protect children and parents from potentially violent situations. The safe visitation initiative operates in five pilot cities – in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, and Red Deer – with a sixth site being established in Fort McMurray. These pilot sites are provided to families wishing to reduce the likelihood of a violent altercation during child visitation. In providing access to children for both parents, this provides a necessary location to ease tension during familial separation. Each time the service is utilized, the pilot sites are required to maintain documentation for the purpose of managing the supervised visits and related services. Although these are currently used in high-risk and potentially dangerous situations . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time has now arrived where I must advise all members that our standing orders determine that we must rise. The House stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

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

Table of Contents

Monday afternoon, December 1, 2008

Introduction of Visitors	2129
Introduction of Guests	2129, 2156
Oral Question Period	
Health System Restructuring	2131, 2134, 2139
Oil Sands Development Downturn	2132
Congenital Syphilis Outbreak	212
Physician Recruitment	2133
Farm Worker Safety	2133
Homelessness in East Calgary	2134
Online Shopping	2134
Kiwanis Place Seniors' Residence	2135
Postsecondary Education Funding	2135
Temporary Foreign Workers	2136
Firearms Regulation	2136
Health Care Innovation	2137
Children at Risk	2137
Highway Maintenance	2138
Automobile Insurance	2138
Members' Statements	
Opposition to Proposed Gravel Pit	2139
World AIDS Day	2139
Athletic Therapists	2139
Canadian Citizenship Ceremony in Brooks	2140
Aboriginal Health Careers Bursary	2140
OH Ranch	2140
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	2140
Presenting Petitions	2140
Tabling Returns and Reports	2141
Tablings to the Clerk	2141
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 210 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2008	2141
Bill 211 Documentation of Child Access Exchange Act	2155

COMMITTEES OF THE ALBERTA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Blakeman	Denis	Kang	Olson
DeLong	Johnston	Notley	

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Rodney

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Benito	Doerksen	Johnston	Notley
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Lukaszuk	Sarich
Chase			

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Allred

Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor

Amery	Campbell	Mason	Weadick
Bhullar	Marz	McFarland	Xiao
Blakeman			

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr. Marz

Blakeman	Lund	Mitzel	Webber
Lukaszuk	MacDonald	Notley	

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. Horne

Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor

Dallas	Notley	Quest	Swann
Denis	Olson	Sherman	Vandermeer
Fawcett			

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel

Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Bhullar	Horne	MacDonald	Notley
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Marz	Webber
Campbell			

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski

Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle

Elniski	Mason	Snelgrove	VanderBurg
Hehr	Rodney	Taylor	Weadick
Leskiw			

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown

Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred	Calahasen	Jacobs	Sandhu
Amery	Dallas	MacDonald	Sarich
Anderson	Doerksen	McQueen	Swann
Benito	Fawcett	Olson	Xiao
Boutilier	Forsyth	Quest	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Amery	Doerksen	McFarland	Sherman
Berger	Forsyth	Notley	Stevens
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Oberle	Taylor
Calahasen	Leskiw	Pastoor	Zwozdesky
DeLong	Liepert	Rogers	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald

Deputy Chair: Mr. Griffiths

Benito	Denis	Johnson	Sandhu
Bhardwaj	Drysdale	Kang	Vandermeer
Chase	Fawcett	Mason	Woo-Paw
Dallas	Jacobs	Quest	

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang

Anderson	Cao	MacDonald	Sandhu
Brown	Jacobs	Notley	Woo-Paw
Calahasen			

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Dr. Swann

Berger	Griffiths	Mason	Oberle
Boutilier	Hehr	McQueen	Webber
Drysdale			

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 - 107 Street
EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4

.....

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name _____

Address _____

.....

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

Address subscription inquiries to Subscriptions, Legislative Assembly Office, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1302.

Address other inquiries to Managing Editor, *Alberta Hansard*, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1875.