



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 6, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon. Welcome back.

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 Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

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

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Thank you again, Mr. Lorieau. I sincerely hope that as the week closes, you will not be unemployed in your evening job. Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery, two outstanding Canadians, the Rt. Hon. Don Mazankowski and Mr. Paul Desmarais.

Of course, Mr. Don Mazankowski, officer of the Order of Canada, Alberta Order of Excellence, first elected MP for Vegreville in 1968, served in so many different capacities in the House of Commons but last and most importantly as the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, also as Minister of Finance at some very crucial times for the country of Canada, and a patriot of the Alberta Heart Institute. He's accompanied today by Mr. Paul Desmarais, a chairman of Power Corp of Canada, of course, executive of numerous corporations around the world, member of Privy Council, companion of the Order of Canada. Mr. Paul Desmarais is here today to visit the Mazankowski Heart Institute.

I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Yerlan Abildayev, the ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Accompanying His Excellency is Adilzhan Ruziev, the second secretary at the embassy in Ottawa. I was honoured to host a special luncheon today in honour of His Excellency's first visit to Alberta. Alberta and Kazakhstan share many similarities. We are both geographically and ethnically diverse areas with vast natural resources. Our common interests have created a solid trading

relationship, which we look forward to increasing in the future. We value our relationship with our friends in Kazakhstan and the opportunities our partnership creates.

I would ask that His Excellency and the second secretary rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the secretary of planning for the Mexican state of Jalisco, Dr. Victor Manuel González Romero, and his wife, Dr. Maria Morfin Otero.

This year we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the twinning relationship between Jalisco and Alberta. This twinning relationship has allowed us to explore common areas of interest in agriculture, education, forestry, science, technology, and the environment. I might add, although it may be in self-interest, that they also produce copious quantities of tequila. By pursuing our common areas of interest, Mexico has become one of Alberta's fastest growing export markets, ranked fourth as our largest trading partner.

Dr. González is in Alberta to speak at a conference hosted by Athabasca University, and I understand that he will be touring the Legislature Building later and meeting with our Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Mr. Speaker, Dr. González and Dr. Morfin are seated in your gallery. I would ask that they rise and please accept the warm applause of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Jalisco is also the home of the rodeo and the mariachi in addition to tequila.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure through you to members of the Assembly to introduce Anzac school in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. There are 26 visitors today, including teachers and parent helpers. I'd ask this energetic group from Anzac school to stand and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the Assembly a visiting group from Suzuki charter school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. There are 17 students with us today. I understand that earlier they had a model parliament before their lunch break. They are led today by their teacher, Miss Eva Bauernhuber. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I along with my colleagues from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Meadowlark, and Edmonton-Ellerslie had the distinct honour today of hosting some folks from India. These folks all belong to the Indian film and music industry and are, indeed, international superstars in their own right.

I'd first like to introduce Mr. Jazzy Bains, who is a singer. If you could rise. Mr. Bains has sold albums in the millions and is actually a native of Vancouver.

Next, comedian Gurpreet Ghuggi, who is, indeed, an advocate for the rule of law and has a very interesting way of communicating that to the Indian public.

Next, Miss Kulraj Randhawa, who was host of a popular Indian TV show, *Kareena Kareena*, and is currently in Canada to launch her second movie, *Tera Mera Ki Rishta*. Mr. Speaker, I won't try to translate that as I'm not known as being one for love movies, but needless to say, I encourage all members to watch this movie on April 10.

Last, Mr. Sukhwinder Chohla, who is a journalist from the *Ajit* newspaper in Jalandhar, and locally Mr. Gurbhalinder Sandhu, who is the editor of the *Des Pardes Times* newspaper and the co-ordinator for the event.

I ask all members to show our western hospitality to these individuals.

1:40

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm honoured as a former hockey player and coach myself to introduce to you and through you a sports legend in India, Mr. Pargat Singh, seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Singh is the king of field hockey, the captain of India's field hockey team in two consecutive Olympics along with numerous international competitions. In fact, he was awarded Padma Shri and Arjuna awards for his achievements, the highest awards you can receive in India. Mr. Singh has done much for the sport in India and around the world. I would ask Pargat Singh to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. It is also my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a good friend and a prominent member of the community, Mr. Joe Sunner, seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Sunner is the proud owner of Durabuilt Windows & Doors, with his head office in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Calder. Mr. Sunner has proven himself to be a good, generous man. Among his many contributions to the province one that stands out is his donation of \$100,000 to the Guru Nanak Dev Healing Garden at the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute. At this time I would ask Mr. Sunner to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives and staff from the Capital Region Board. Last Thursday the board presented the Minister of Municipal Affairs with its long-term growth plan. The members have shown excellent collaboration and co-operation so far, and I applaud them for their efforts.

Board members with us today are Mayor Kirk Popik, town of Calmar; Mayor Stephen Mandel, city of Edmonton; Reeve Wayne Woldanski, Lamont county; Mayor Greg Krischke, city of Leduc; Mayor Lloyd Bertschi, town of Morinville; Mayor Mel Smith, town of Redwater; Mayor Nolan Crouse, city of St. Albert; Mayor Stuart Houston, city of Spruce Grove; Mayor Cathy Olesen, Strathcona county; Mayor Camille Berube, town of Beaumont; Mayor Don Rigney, Sturgeon county; Mayor Allan Gee, village of Thorsby. Board alternates with us today also include Councillor Ed Gibbons, city of Edmonton; Councillor Ben Van De Walle, town of Morinville; Councillor Art Erickson, village of Wabamun. Capital Region Board staff joining us today are Chief Officer Kathleen LeClair,

Andy Haden, Brandy Moorhead, Lisa Sederski, Sharon Shuya, and Peter Tarnawsky. Also, from Strathcona county are Yolande Shaw and David Turner. Our guests are seated in the members' gallery today, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

**Ms Evans:** It's a thrill today to introduce some women who have made huge contributions to community service throughout the capital region, most specifically to young ladies. Members of the 3rd Trefoil Guild, representing the Guides: Mary Gerritsen, Margaret Campbell, Edna Dach, Carmel Fenniak, Kathy Morris, Ruth Strandberg, and Mae Hadley. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise as we show appreciation for their attendance here today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly government employees from Employment and Immigration. These dedicated professionals work in the following areas of our department: immigration policy and programs, international qualifications assessment, Alberta immigrant nominee program, strategic marketing, and labour attraction. Their collective work ensures that newcomers are always welcome to our province, that they have the means to settle and make a successful life in Alberta. It is also their efforts that keep Alberta on the national and international radar as a destination of choice for immigrants. I'm honoured to welcome them here today and ask that all members of the Assembly give our guests a very warm welcome to the Legislature.

**Mr. Blakett:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Chief Ron Morin, Mr. John Park, and Mr. Paul Bercier. Chief Ron Morin has lived on the Enoch reserve his entire life and was the youngest chief elected to the Enoch Cree Nation, in 1993. The chief, as a man of great vision, has been instrumental in developing a number of innovative community-based projects. To name only a few, he was a key player in the successful development of the River Cree Resort and Casino, representing a \$180 million investment. He oversaw the Millennium Housing Project and is currently pursuing the development of environmentally friendly refining right here in Alberta. I wish him luck in this ambitious project and admire his interest in investing in the future of our province through alternative, environmentally friendly energy resources.

Also with us this afternoon is Mr. John Park, the founding and current president of RCI bank of Canada. Out of Vancouver Mr. Park oversees the operations of Renaissance Capital Inc. and RCIC. He has been involved with Canada's immigrant program for the last 11 years, and prior to leading RCI, he successfully managed the Alberta-based royal Canadian immigrant fund.

Mr. Bercier is also with us today, a constituent of mine and exemplary Albertan and Canadian. He has served in our Canadian armed forces for over 16 years and, as such, has been awarded the Canadian Forces decoration/medal and United Nations service medal in commemoration of his first-rate service to our country. Now a consultant with Willow Industries Mr. Bercier brings to that company many years of environmental-related experience through his service on a number of national and provincial committees. A few of those include clean water/life and the national Métis committee on economic development, natural resources, and the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that our accomplished guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We have with us today Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop of the farm workers union of Alberta. The Farmworkers Union of Alberta was recognized as a legitimate voice of Alberta farm workers by none less than Judge Peter Barley when he granted the union legal standing at the inquiry into Kevan Chandler's fatality. They're here to remind the Premier and the ministers that the Farmworkers Union of Alberta stands ready for immediate consultations on implementing Judge Barley's recommendations to include paid farm workers under occupational health and safety legislation. They'll even meet you today if you wish, folks. Please give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House some constituents from the constituency of Mackay. I would like to ask these gentlemen to stand as I call their name: Mr. Appy Bhullar, brother of the Member for Calgary-Montrose, Mr. Balraj Randhawa, and Mr. Sam Sidhu. I would like the members to give them the warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are now going to be up against a standing order, and I think it's prudent that we now proceed to Oral Question Period.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Government Hosting Expenses

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has many wasteful and lavish spending habits. Hosting expenses on amounts over \$600, as publicly issued in the *Alberta Gazette*, have soared in the last five years, yet the government admitted last week that there is no official hospitality budget. You can't control costs without a budget. To the Premier: given that over \$1.3 million was spent on hosting expenses last year, why is there no official budget for hospitality expenses in the government?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member that asked the question is chair of the Public Accounts Committee and is fully aware of the budgeting process we use in this House, fully transparent in terms of all of the expenses that are put forward tied to any hosting done by a minister, by any MLA, or any member of the staff of any of the executive offices or any of the MLA offices.

1:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. The budget process as we know it is certainly flawed.

Again to the Premier. Of all the government departments the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations spent the most on hosting expenses, over \$155,000, in 2008. [interjections]

It's not a laughing matter. Where did the department find the money for all the dinners and drinks when there is no official hospitality budget?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the records will show that the minister responsible for International and Intergovernmental Relations has lived within the budget that was set by this Assembly last year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Environment beat out the ministry of advanced education for second place in the hospitality sweepstakes, spending \$131,000 in 2008. Again to the Premier: where did the department find the money for all the dinners and drinks when there is no official hospitality budget?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again, the ministers are assigned budgets, and their responsibility is to live within those budgets. I'm proud to say as we have ended this fiscal year, March 31, 2009, that all of our ministry budgets ended up being balanced.

**The Speaker:** Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

### Achievement Bonuses

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In only five years bonuses given to the child and family services authorities have increased by 92 per cent, from \$548,000 in 2003 to over \$1 million last year. In that same five-year period we have children being put into hotels, inadequate compensation and support for foster parents, and a Child and Youth Advocate that can't produce reports on time. It is inexcusable that your minister of children's services is allowing this situation to continue. To the Premier: how can you justify a 92 per cent increase in bonuses to senior officials given the recent track record of the children's services ministry?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that our minister of children's services has done. At a time where the economy is either increasing very rapidly and we have more children at risk, that are now in the hands of this government in terms of care, or the economy is slowing down and we're heading into a recession, we may have more families that require help. With respect to the bonuses this is a decision that I had made, that bonuses will be paid as of the end of this fiscal year, March 31, 2009, and no bonuses for next year. That's in keeping with the agreement we had with all our staff, both unionized and non-unionized.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I'm assuming the buck stops with the Premier, and \$40 million worth of bucks will be flowing out in June. They should have stopped sooner.

Why was the Premier allowing some of the child and family services authorities to submit budgets up to eight months behind schedule last year yet still rewarding them with achievement bonuses? What exactly did they achieve if they can't even submit their budgets on time?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from in terms of budgets. Budgets were delivered here to the House. The budget for the ministry was debated, and the motion

was passed to approve the budget. From what I gather, it was done in a timely fashion and gave the minister the power to expend the dollars that were given to her by the power of the vote of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. To clarify, the money that was approved in April 2008 by this House was not approved locally by Calgary until late November.

Why did compensation for foster parents and other supports for children in care only increase by a tiny fraction of the amount that bonuses did? An extra million dollars would certainly go a long way to help the children in the care of our province.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again, this is an agreement we had with about 6,100 management people across the province of Alberta. We lived up to that agreement. I would say that all of the management personnel, through their responsible deputy ministers, came forward and said that for next year, given the fact that our revenue stream is diminished considerably and we'll have more to do with less, let's work together. We won't go through the management bonuses. We'll save money going into next year so that we can look after the most vulnerable in the province.

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

#### Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta trails the entire country when it comes to safety and rights for paid farm workers. This government clings to outdated policies while dozens of farm workers unnecessarily die and hundreds are unnecessarily injured. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why under this government's policy the truck driver with the hauling company that carries the cattle has the right to join a union, but the worker who loads the cattle at the feedlot does not? Why the discrepancy?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I think now the hon. member is talking about whether a farm worker has the right to join a union. I'm not up on all of the labour laws, but I suspect that in any operation if the people that work want to gather and vote on the right to join a union, they have that option. If I'm wrong, then the minister responsible for labour can correct me on that point.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'll correct the Premier. Despite a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, farm workers in Alberta are explicitly forbidden from organizing unions. My question is to the Premier. Since he delivered that answer in a spirit of goodwill, will he and his government live up to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada and grant paid farm workers in Alberta the right they deserve, which is the right to unionize?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, one of the things we do have to determine first is what size of operation the hon. member is talking about. Are they talking about a feedlot operation with three people working? Are they talking about one that's 30, 40, 50? Are they talking about seasonal workers that may operate on a vegetable farm or those that work seasonally during the time of harvest? These are all the kind of questions that we're asking agriculture, those that are in the business, to give us suggestions so that we can develop a good policy position.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're actually talking about all paid farm workers, whether it's three paid workers at a small feedlot or 50 at a big feedlot. They're all paid. They all, under the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, ought to have the right to organize unions. Again in the spirit of openness that the Premier is providing here: is the Premier prepared to move this issue forward and help Alberta's paid farm workers get the right they deserve, which would be the right to unionize? Can we move this issue forward, please?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're now in the middle of consultations. The minister of labour and also the minister of agriculture are holding consultations. We'll bring forward the evidence, what we hear from the agricultural community, bring it forward to the House, and the policy will be debated. This is where it's appropriately debated, I would think.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

#### Carbon Capture and Storage

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's carbon capture scheme is a \$2 billion boondoggle in the making. Big oil players have yanked their applications because the only thing CCS has proven to be so far is a big waste of money, yet this government seems committed to rolling the dice in tomorrow's budget so long as the public purse pays the debts when they come due. To the Premier: why won't you scrap the CCS program from tomorrow's budget and use that money instead to create real, long-term jobs in the renewable energy sector?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I guess she already knows what's in the budget.

In all honesty, I know that the hon. member is following up on a bit of a stunt that Greenpeace did today. To those that are watching, somebody said that they hid \$600 someplace on the Leg. Grounds. I don't know. Mr. Speaker, it's your grounds. Maybe we can ask people to find the 600 bucks.

2:00

You know, in all honesty, Mr. Speaker, the largest carbon footprint in the province is generated by coal-fired electricity plants. Those are the ones that had actually applied to the CCS fund. That is where we should start first. If we don't, the cost of electricity is going to skyrocket. It will further diminish our global competitiveness, and we will see more job loss.

They will not tell you that their goal is to significantly increase – increase – the cost of electricity. They feel that if they increase the cost of electricity, then they'll be able to bring down the carbon footprint because you and I would not be able to afford to turn our lights on in our house. That's what they want.

**Ms Notley:** The largest greenhouse gas emission will be the oil sands if you carry on the way you want to, and electricity will come down when you start creating renewable energy.

Your own figures show that dollars invested in infrastructure create nearly four times the jobs of a dollar in oil and gas, and meanwhile the Construction Owners Association of Alberta expects the sharpest rise in job losses to occur late this year or early next year. To the Premier: why won't you landfill your carbon capture idea, admit that it's just a PR tool, and prevent further job losses by investing this money where it creates the most jobs, in infrastructure?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, actually, the \$2 billion that we set aside in carbon capture has been recognized as a very important policy. It has been recognized internationally: London, The Hague, throughout Europe. Even the President of the United States himself recognized that carbon capture is the way to go. Out of a 50-year span it's the first 30 years, more than likely, before there's new technology. Let's use carbon capture to bring down the level of carbon on our continent. This is a very, very good way of doing it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, tar sands executives don't seem to agree. They say that it's too expensive, too uncertain, and it's not likely to work. Now, meanwhile Alberta has lost more than 30,000 jobs this year, and more people are being put out of work every day. Thousands of qualified construction workers are looking to this government for help, and the answer in tomorrow's budget will be to bury their 2 billion tax dollars down a hole for PR and nothing else. Why won't you admit that using public policy to subsidize carbon capture is a fool's pursuit in tough times and invest this money in stimulus green jobs instead?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of irony, I guess. *National Geographic* did this article on Alberta. The actual text by *National Geographic* was fair and balanced, but the pictures that they used – unfortunately, they put in the picture of the open pit but not the picture of the reclaimed area of the oil sands. But, you know, so be it. Those are the issues that we have to face. At the same time the irony is that *National Geographic* is part of the Aspen Institute, which last week recognized Alberta – Alberta – of all the countries and the jurisdictions in the world, as taking a leadership role in carbon capture and storage.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Municipal Sustainability Initiative

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that Alberta's municipalities receive significant support from this government through the municipal sustainability initiative. This unprecedented program assists municipalities to manage growth-related challenges and enhance their long-term planning. I know that the municipalities in my constituency have accessed this funding for their communities. My question, therefore, is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How is MSI helping Alberta's communities today?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. MSI is having a real impact. Municipalities decide what their local priorities should be. Municipalities and communities are seeing new roads. We're seeing recreation centres. We're seeing fire halls. We're seeing libraries. MSI is making a difference today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the same minister. I would ask him: how is the government ensuring that MSI is used effectively in today's challenging economic times?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, municipalities are committed to building strong communities, and so is this government. This

support is unmatched throughout this country. This government has also added extra flexibility. Interest can now be used by municipalities to offset projects that they are bringing forward. So they can use the interest from MSI. This is moving forward with infrastructure programs. This is allowing municipalities to do what they feel is best.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How will this change benefit Albertans today?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that there's a very simple answer: it will keep Albertans working. It will accelerate projects by having lower construction costs, and it will continue to build vital infrastructure. It's important. This government will continue to partner with municipalities such as you see here today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

#### Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In July last year Syncrude officials reported to Sustainable Resource Development the final count of the ducks drowned in the tailings ponds. These officials were then instructed to withhold releasing the numbers to the public. Eight months later the Minister of Environment didn't know the final count. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Was it department staff or the minister who ordered that the information be kept from the public and from his colleague?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing for the member opposite that she's not in a court of law. That would be called a leading question. There were no orders given to anybody. We got the same numbers that she got, that everybody got last fall. Over the course of the fall and winter I heard that the numbers were higher, but this was in the course of an investigation. I didn't hear any specific numbers till they were made public last week.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, the Syncrude officials were very clear on who they reported to, and it was your department.

An additional question to the same minister: is it policy for departmental staff to decide that a member of cabinet would not receive vital information?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way has her facts wrong. Syncrude worked with government staff in dealing with the ducks. If she has read the report, as I'm sure she has, subsequent to the initial count ducks were floating to the surface. This took time. As I said, there was no attempt made to suppress any information. It was confined in the context of the potential litigation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. This question is to the Minister of Environment. While the final number of dead ducks may not matter for the purposes of a judicial investigation and the laying of charges, does the minister not require final numbers for the purposes of assigning monitoring staff and other department-related actions?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess herein lies the difference between being the opposition critic and being the government minister. The minister is responsible for getting the job done. The critic is responsible for a degree of political grandstanding, and I think that's what we have on our hands here.

The actual number of ducks is part of the investigation that led to charges being laid. I think it's appropriate that we let the courts deal with that number in an appropriate manner. As for her question as to whether the number of duck mortality should affect the degree to which we have compliance with our legislation, of course not, Mr. Speaker. We enforce our legislation rigidly every day.

#### 2:10 Postsecondary Application System

**Mr. Dallas:** Mr. Speaker, I've heard from a few students and parents in my constituency that applying to postsecondary institutions can be both a frustrating and time-consuming process. My first question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With your new focus on a province-wide planning system will the application process get any better?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I have heard those same comments, that it can be a frustrating process. In fact, being a parent of postsecondary students, I've found that out myself.

Alberta has been developing a new system. It's called ApplyAlberta. It's an important step forward for students to be able to apply to any one of our institutions in the province from one portal. We're testing the system out currently. Students will be able to create one profile on the system. All of their transcripts and all of their information will be uploaded into that one profile. They can apply with that one profile to a number of institutions across Campus Alberta.

**Mr. Dallas:** Mr. Speaker, my second question is also for the same minister. That sounds great, but when will ApplyAlberta be up and running so that students can actually use it?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, it's important that we get the system up and running as quickly as possible because another benefit to it will be for us to be able to track student demand and the demand in certain areas. By the fall of this year, 2009, all 21 of the public postsecondary institutions are expected to be using ApplyAlberta. The funding is already in place. In fact, we've already been doing some trials at the University of Lethbridge. We've conducted a test of the system with students and with parents, and by all indications it's a big hit.

**Mr. Dallas:** My final question to the same minister: will students have to pay more to use this multi-application system?

**Mr. Horner:** There's not going to be any additional cost, Mr. Speaker. Students will not have to pay for the transcripts either. Most of Alberta's public postsecondary institutions do charge an application fee, and the students will be required to pay those application fees to those institutions that they choose to apply to. But in terms of the new system there'll be no new additional charges.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

#### Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While externally fixed bars are considered an illegal fire hazard for secondary suites, they are currently legally acceptable for owner-occupied homes. For the past 20 years fixed external bars together with junior jailer-controlled locked bedroom doors have been key components of the nonaccredited Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, which poses as a government-regulated residential treatment program. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: if externally fixed bars are considered a danger for rental tenants, why aren't they considered a threat for home-owning family members or for the vulnerable youth prisoners of forced AARC confinement?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta has very strong building and fire codes to help individuals keep safe in secondary suites. Municipalities choose whether to permit secondary suites. Standards for new suites have been in force since December of 2006. We are working with municipalities to ensure that the right standards are in place.

**Mr. Chase:** You completely missed the question. Secondary suites are enforced. Homeowners can bar their homes without any kind of result from your department. The rules need to be changed.

To the Minister of Justice: given the broad range of legal exemptions under the assumption that a person's home is not only their castle but can serve as a jail, what type of mandatory correctional training should homeowner wardens or their junior jailers have to ensure the safety of our prisoners?

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not even quite sure of the point of that question or what the answer to that might be, but I don't think it's within the purview of my department.

**Mr. Chase:** The point is that no one in this government is looking out for the well-being of children imprisoned in homes.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how can your ministry account for the physical safety or psychological well-being of either vulnerable adolescent prisoners or the families of at-risk youths who are required as participants in the AARC program to become jailers in your government's unregulated home prisons?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, what this government is concerned about is that if we have a youth that is in need of help, we help these youth. Sometimes in this Legislature you do something that you have a fair bit of pride in. During the break I happened to receive this from the families of AARC, from the students who've gone through the program. I'm going to table this so that that member can stand up and talk to these hundreds of students who've gone through this program, and he can read whether or not the program is working.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

#### Capital Region Municipal Planning

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago the Minister of Municipal Affairs established the Capital Region Board, and I'm pleased that there are a fair number of them in the audience today. He gave them the mandate to come up with a land-use plan and transportation plan by the end of March 2009. These plans have now been developed into one comprehensive plan, the capital region



growth plan, which was unveiled last week. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please tell this House how this growth plan will affect municipalities in the capital region?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier created the Capital Region Board because he saw a tremendous opportunity for the region. Regional co-operation is a priority for this government for the success of the region and also for this province. It is absolutely critical that what has taken place with the regional board be accented: communication, collaboration, co-operation. This approach will support strong and viable communities in this region.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree that this has been a very significant accomplishment for this region's municipalities. In reference to these plans, will these plans control development within all municipalities in the capital region?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no. This is not about controlling development. This is a regional look at planning, and this is an integrated and strategic approach to regional planning. It is imperative that we look in the long term in regard to development and infrastructure and conservation. This process ultimately supports, as I said before, a very strong capital region.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. I understand that a similar plan is being prepared for the Calgary region. When will that plan be completed?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Regional Partnership is up on a website for comments not only from adjoining municipalities but from individuals. They have said that they hope to have their plan in place by June. As with the capital region plan, I'm very much looking forward to the Calgary plan as well as other co-operative efforts that are taking place in this province to help develop communities.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Centralized Cytology Lab Service

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now clear that there was a request for proposals sent to lab service providers and that there are plans to only have two provincial labs providing cytology services. On March 19 in question period the Minister of Health and Wellness suggested that my questions were based on rumours and appeared not to know anything about the proposed changes. My questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness would be: whose decision was it to centralize the cytology lab service? Was it the minister's or the Health Services Board's?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the member is correct relative to the earlier question, and I make no apologies for saying that I was not familiar with the question but subsequent to that did ask for an answer. The answer I have is that these lab services are being centralized to Calgary and Edmonton, and there are a number of good reasons for it. The decision, by the way, was made by Alberta Health Services.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I'm wondering: what is the time frame for the decision and the timeline for implementation? I'm sure the minister must know.

2:20

**Mr. Liepert:** I don't have the exact timeline, but the decision has been made, and I presume that it will be implemented soon.

**Ms Pastoor:** The decision has been made. Thank you for that. I guess we'll all just sit and wait and see what that decision was.

You've indicated that there was a good reason for it. Would you table evidence and results that could show that a cost-benefit analysis of centralizing cytology lab services was performed?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't indicate that the reason it was being centralized was because of cost. What I did say was that there are good reasons for it, and I'd be happy to supply the member with a written answer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

#### Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

*(continued)*

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government covered up the truth that over 1,600 ducks were killed in a Syncrude tar pond. On February 9 this year the Environment minister – and I'll use his word – grandstanded, boasting about the charges against Syncrude in a press conference, but conveniently forgot to mention that the death toll of the ducks was more than three times that which people had been previously led to believe. To the minister: how long will your campaign of cover-ups continue before Albertans get the transparency that they deserve?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I've indicated publicly that I became aware that the initial estimate of 500 ducks was going to be exceeded fairly early on in the process, but by that point we had an investigation under way. That investigation subsequently led to charges being laid. Those charges are now before the courts. The number of ducks that were involved in this is very much material evidence in that case. I think that it would be inappropriate and perhaps even an affront to the courts if I was to disclose publicly information that will be part of an ongoing court case.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister previously said that the number of ducks would have no impact on the penalty sought, so I don't see what the relevance actually could possibly be. Now, the minister was reported as saying that he never knew how many ducks died on the pond until Syncrude went public. Then when we found out that his underlings in the ministry knew well before that, the minister said that the truth was irrelevant. Then he said what we've heard again, that it would hurt the case against Syncrude, which is ridiculous because Syncrude is who made it public. To the minister. You're either embroiled in another cover-up, or members of your ministry aren't doing their jobs. Which is it?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, there was an investigation. In the course of that investigation there was a determination on the mortality of ducks in this circumstance. The numbers that have been brought forward by Syncrude are a requirement under their operating to report bird mortality. The investigation will present the evidence in

court, and that evidence is part of the court proceeding. I can't comment on whether or not Syncrude's numbers are the same as the investigators' numbers.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this cover-up has swollen Alberta's international black eye even more. It has been reported in *National Geographic*, in *Forbes* magazine, in the *Washington Times*, in the *Denver Post*, on CBS, and it's all over the Internet. This cover-up was over dead ducks. Last month we learned that charges of pollution in the Athabasca River were kept quiet on the eve of an election. To the minister: how many cover-ups need to be exposed before you learn that honesty is the best policy?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, every member in this House – well, with the exception perhaps of that one – knows that I have a reputation of being a straight shooter. The point of the matter is that there sometimes is a balance that must be maintained between transparency and being successful in prosecution. I would suggest that this hon. member would be far more critical of this minister if as a result of disclosure of inappropriate information, this company was able to get off on a technicality. That's the reason why we're very careful.

#### Health Services Board Remuneration

**Mr. McFarland:** Mr. Speaker, during our break a small southern city daily newspaper made a report about a 25 per cent increase in rates of remuneration to the new Alberta health board. The subsequent calls to my constituency office came up with the consensus that per diems are quite fine but that these \$50,000 honoraria are obscene. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: can you explain just what component of this salary remuneration package has a 25 per cent increase and how it came about?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there was no increase. What the situation is is that when we created the one health board last spring, we appointed an interim board and put in place a temporary honorarium. As we moved towards appointing a full-time board last December, I did two things. First of all, I asked the chair to give me an indication of the amount of work that they had taken on, but secondly, I also did a comparative factor of boards of similar size and responsibility. The ministerial order was signed – I think it was last November – designating the honorarium for the permanent board of Alberta Health Services.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister please explain to me what the governance savings are for this government when you compare the honoraria, the per diem, and the travel expenses of these 15 board members with the 15 other regional so-called voluntary board members that were in place?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I can't do that because we need to allow the board to have at least one year of operation under the permanent structure before we have some actual data. I do need to ensure that I correct something that the member said in his question, and that is that the previous regional health authority boards also received honoraria. It was in varying degrees, but they were not strictly volunteer board members.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: would the minister please outline if possible the salary range – this is

coming from constituents who want to know what the salary range is – of the new senior executive, the CAO, CEO, COO, or whatever they're referred to as?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when the new CEO of Alberta Health Services was hired, there was a news release issued. It's on the website. My recollection is that the salary of the new CEO is some \$575,000 annually, which is certainly commensurate with other salaries for running an organization of that size. I don't have in front of me the other executives' salaries, but I can tell you that they're less than that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

#### Grizzly Bear Protection

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown a continued neglect for the protection of the grizzly bear in Alberta. Current numbers show that the population is more at risk than ever. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has said that the anecdotal stories from hunters will be compared to detailed DNA data when determining whether to allow the hunting of Alberta grizzlies. Why does the minister place as much weight on anecdotes as on scientific evidence?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, I don't say that the two are equal at all. What I'm saying is that the very people that have done the scientific evidence are interested in looking at the anecdotal evidence as another way of looking at the same phenomena. This sort of triangulation of data is a healthy way to go about it and will produce better results. The two different groups are collaborating, and the result will be better data for us to make our decision on.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister's own Endangered Species Conservation Committee report from 2002 states that "the biological status of species should be determined by independent scientists using the best science available in an open and transparent process." Why, then, is the minister giving hunting groups an equal say in determining the status of the grizzly bear?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, we are using the best available scientific evidence. We're using exactly the same methodology that was used in the Yellowstone park area to do a successful grizzly bear status assessment down there. It's nonsense to say that we're giving different groups a say. This isn't a question about giving different groups a say. It's a question of taking different types of data gathered in different ways and actually, in cross-referencing them, getting a better result.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, then explain to me this, Mr. Minister: how is it that a biological status by an independent group of scientists couldn't be done by them alone? Why are we relying on two separate groups to do this?

2:30

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, every sampling strategy has its strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses of the DNA are that you're baiting specific sites and expecting or predicting that bears pass through and leave some DNA. It is considered one of the best sampling techniques available, as I said, used in the Yellowstone park study, but

it has its weakness: you put the sampling sites in areas where bears are available. The complementarity of the two data sets, I repeat, is the combination of the two studies, not a weakness.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### First Nations Development Fund Grants

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I attended a meeting with representatives of Treaty 6 along with several MLA colleagues and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. The First Nations development fund was discussed, and some First Nations said that there are delays in processing the requests. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What can be done to speed up the application process for this grant program?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I think the application process is already very streamlined. In fact, last year we reviewed 200-plus applications, and that bodes well for the staff involved. But as part of our due diligence sometimes we do require additional information or additional budget items to be addressed, and in every case we require a band resolution to accompany the grant request. Those kinds of things can sometimes precipitate understandable delays, but we are working with First Nations more closely than ever right now to help with the process and help ensure that the applications that do come in are completed properly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the grant payout timelines be amended so that First Nations might receive their grants sooner than once every three months?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, that issue actually goes back to the original agreement that was negotiated by the First Nations and the government of Alberta in 2001. I'm happy to say, though, that under that particular policy we've never had any late payments, at least none that were precipitated by us. If we were to contemplate a change in the due process of that particular issue, we would have to consult with all 47 First Nations again and, of course, with the gaming and liquor control people, and that would precipitate delays. Finally, if we were to look at additional payments, that would require additional administration and additional costs as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: given that the FNDF program is achieving good success in First Nation communities, will you consider expanding the program's criteria and project eligibility so that more projects can be funded?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** In fact, Mr. Speaker, all projects that are eligible right now include infrastructure projects, economic development projects, social development projects, and community development projects, but we are wanting to be clear that projects that are not eligible would include such things as gaming activities or per capita distributions or payments against loans or payments against debts. Those are clearly outside the purview and not eligible. I'm happy to tell the hon. member that we have not had to decline any applications under the First Nations development fund program using the current criteria, which, in my view, are therefore working quite effectively.

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

#### Oil and Gas Industry Fracturing Chemicals

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Pennsylvania natural gas companies are allowed to keep their fracking formulas proprietary, but the ingredients are public record. In Alberta companies can keep the chemical compounds in their fracturing fluid secret, and therefore scientists do not know what to test for. This puts Alberta's groundwater at risk. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What reason does the government have for allowing companies to keep secret the chemicals used in their fracking formulas?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, that question would more appropriately be addressed to the Minister of Energy, responsible for ERCB.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that is the case in Alberta and British Columbia. I don't know about Saskatchewan and other provinces. In fact, the majority of the frac fluid used in the province of Alberta currently, particularly in unconventional gas – and I believe it's the area that the member opposite would be suggesting is taking place in the eastern United States – is water. Secondly, the areas that are fracked in the province of Alberta are not anywhere near potable or surface water contaminant possibilities.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, then, to the same minister: how does the government expect to get a true result from the testing of Albertans' well water that is close to well sites if the scientists do not know what to test for?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is that if there is any indication of the types of surfactants or release agents that actually provide lubricant to push frac fluids and frac solids into fractures in production facilities underground, if there was any contamination, cross-contamination, it would not be difficult for the ERCB to be able to determine what those contaminants and chemicals were.

**Ms Blakeman:** Secrets, secrets.

Back to the same minister: given that diesel is commonly used in other centres as a fracking agent, how can Albertans be sure that diesel is not being used here and is not contaminating our groundwater?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that again is an entirely different process that the member is talking about. Most certainly, we do have areas in certain circumstances in the province where the geology is sensitive to water and water contamination of the geology causes decrease in production capability, but it's a completely different issue and used for different processes in the industry.

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

#### Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The assured income for the severely handicapped program, known as AISH, is a very good and unique program in Alberta. The rising cost of living has put great pressure on Alberta AISH recipients, who are already counting on

every dollar they receive. To the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what is the government doing to support AISH recipients through this difficult economic downturn time?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, the AISH program will continue to provide financial assistance and a wide range of health and supplemental benefits to eligible Albertans with disabilities. Front-line staff work closely with AISH clients to advise them of the benefits available to them. Staff with the AISH program are also working with other ministries to ensure that when an AISH client is referred, they are referred to a program that will meet their unique needs.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you. To the same minister. My constituent, who is an AISH recipient, met with me a few weeks ago. She has a dependent child, so she receives an additional \$100 a month on top of her AISH income. My question to the minister is: what happens to this additional amount when she turns 18 and is still dependent on her parent?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, the AISH program will continue to provide the \$100 child benefit to clients for a dependent child who is between the ages of 18 and 20 and who is also attending high school. The dependent child is also eligible for health and supplemental health benefits during this time. When dependent children become adults, it's our hope that with the education that they are receiving, they will be able to pursue the opportunities available to them in our province. They could also apply for government programs such as student loans or income support specific to their own personal situation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you. To the same minister. The AISH recipient who has dependent children can earn up to \$975 before the benefits are reduced. When the child turns 18, this limit amount is reduced to \$400. Can the minister look into this to make it fair when the child is still dependent on the AISH recipient?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, the AISH client would not have their employment income exemption rate reduced if the dependent adult continues to attend high school and is between the ages of 18 and 20 years. As I mentioned in my previous answer, the AISH client would also continue to receive the \$100 child benefit. AISH also provides a children's education benefit to assist clients with the costs of dependent children attending preschool through high school.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that concludes the question period. There were 96 questions and responses today.

We'll now return to the Routine. The Routine was at the subject matter of ministerial statements. I will introduce the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and will ask him to convey to his delightful wife, Lorraine, our grateful thank you's for putting up with the hon. minister for 35 years in happy marital bliss. She certainly made him a better man.

2:40

## Ministerial Statements

### Capital Region Municipal Planning

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are 25 municipalities in the capital region, large and small, rural and urban. Each has a distinct history and a distinct identity, but they also have a shared interest as we look to the future, an interest in co-

ordinated growth, efficient services, and a high quality of life for all residents in the area. Our government has the same interest. That is why one year ago our Premier brought these municipalities together to plan for future development of the region.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform this House that the Capital Region Board has met the key element of its mandate. Last week the board officially presented me with the capital region growth plan. This is an outstanding accomplishment. It is a testament to the leadership of our Premier and to the leadership of the elected officials from all the capital region municipalities, many of whom, as you see, are with us in the Assembly today.

These municipal leaders are able to work together, plan together, and focus on the best interests of the region as a whole. I know it wasn't easy. They worked hard and made the difficult decisions, and I commend them for their tremendous dedication. In the course of over 80 meetings they compromised when they had to, and most importantly they communicated, they collaborated, and they co-operated. As a result, they were able to develop a blueprint that will help shape the future of this region. The capital region growth plan provides an integrated and strategic approach to that future. It identifies overall development patterns and future infrastructure needs. It will be the mechanism to ensure that decisions are co-ordinated, that duplication is avoided, and that economic growth is promoted.

The plan includes four major elements. First, there is the land-use plan, that is based on the following six principles: protect the environment and the resources, minimize the regional footprint, strengthen communities, increase transportation choice, ensure efficient provision of services, and support regional economic development. Second, Mr. Speaker, there is a plan for a regional intermunicipal transit network. It includes a governance model, service policy, and potential route plans. Third, there is a plan for a region-wide integrated geographic information system. This system will provide the detailed mapping and the electronic data that will be the foundation of more co-ordinated decision-making in years to come. Finally, the capital region growth plan includes a regional strategy for affordable housing. It will enable the region to better accommodate changing demographics and prepare for expected growth.

The government will now review the plan to ensure that it meets the criteria and objectives set out in the Capital Region Board regulation. We will make sure that it aligns with the provincial policy and protects the interests of all residents. We will also continue to support the co-operative efforts of the board as it moves on to the next phase of its work – that work is vital to the future of this region and our province and the government of Alberta – and it will continue to fulfill its role in promoting prosperity and building strong communities in the capital region.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the members of the Capital Region Board for their accomplishments so far. Their successful collaboration is attracting notice from across the country and is a prime example of what can be achieved when we work together. I applaud the board members for their hard work, and I wish them all the best as they continue to work hard and work together for the future of our communities.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The capital region has needed a plan for growth and sustainable development for a long time. I am pleased that the long-awaited capital region growth plan is based on sound principles and new intermunicipal relationships.

I join the hon. minister in congratulating the Premier and the hard-working municipal leaders who hammered out a plan for the long-term benefit of so many citizens. There's no doubt that this would not have happened without the involvement of the Premier, and I think that as time progresses, the entire region will recognize that this is a step in the right direction.

We are glad to see that the plan focuses on sustainable land-use development, affordable housing, and an intermunicipal transit system. These are undoubtedly necessary goals for the continued economic success of Edmonton and the region. We in the Alberta Liberal caucus want to see communities that are environmentally sustainable, well connected, and provide all citizens with a very high quality of life. This plan has the potential to meet those goals.

As with any plan its success will depend on the full support of this government, not just verbal support but ongoing financial and planning support. All too often we've seen this government bring forward excellent plans only to have those plans collect dust on a shelf somewhere, unfunded and unimplemented. The stakes here are too high to allow this to happen again. The capital region has the opportunity for a bright future, but realizing that opportunity will require leadership and action.

A growth plan is a good first step. We are glad that it has been taken and that the region's municipalities have come together, and they have come together, again, through the leadership of the Premier and his hon. minister. But this is only the beginning of a very long journey, one that will require good faith, effort, and hard work from local and provincial leaders alike. I hope that this government follows through with the promise on this plan because it's certainly needed.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has caught my eye. I anticipate that the hon. member will want to request unanimous consent to address the Assembly on this matter. I will do it on her behalf and ask one question: if any hon. member is opposed, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of this House for allowing me the opportunity to respond on behalf of the NDP opposition.

Firstly, I do want to commend both the minister and the Capital Region Board for the hard work that they've put into preparing their report. They have made many positive recommendations, and we hope that the government will follow through on many of them.

However, it is important that we reflect on the past and current situations in order to understand the purpose and importance of the capital plan. The Klein cuts of the '90s included axing the regional planning commissions. This government changed legislation to disband the 10 commissions and repealed their plans, leaving community planning the functions of individual municipalities. Since that action the capital region has faced a number of serious issues, including the impacts of urban sprawl, the transit deficit, duplication of services, problems with economic regional planning, and the need for community-based schools in both new and established neighbourhoods. Municipal planners from outside of Alberta have repeatedly identified a number of deficits in Edmonton with respect to its planning. In short, many of the challenges that we are now very genuinely congratulating the Capital Region Board for starting to address were caused in large part by decisions of this government over 10 years ago.

Now, the Capital Region Board has been asked to look at a number of issues relating to urban and suburban living in our capital region. Among these issues members have been asked to consider a land-use plan, a housing plan, and an intermunicipal transit network. Unfortunately, the government has changed the rules in the time between asking municipal officials to undertake this large task and today. They released a land-use framework that requires substantial legislative changes before any real accomplishments can be reached, and this government, unfortunately, has not yet followed through. They announced a plan to eliminate homelessness without, unfortunately, any monetary commitments, so it has not yet been followed through on. They yanked nearly \$2 billion from the promised Green TRIP, a public transit fund announced a year ago, that this government has not followed through on.

2:50

I commend the Capital Region Board for meeting their mandate and living up to their promises. However, until this government is committed to implementing its recommendations, I am concerned that this report, as identified by others, may just collect dust on the bookshelf. It's obvious that a lot of work has gone into this group and its plan. They've lived up to their side of the bargain, and now it is up to the government to follow through on theirs.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of a number of members to participate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

### Excellence in Teaching Award Semifinalists

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every school day teachers across this province encourage students to embrace and enjoy learning and make valuable and meaningful contributions to students' lives. Our students consistently rank amongst the best in the world, and this is a direct reflection on the tremendous amount of work being done by teachers in Alberta classrooms.

Through the excellence in teaching awards program teachers and principals are recognized for their individual and invaluable commitment to our students and to the future of this province. The nominees for the excellence in teaching awards are teachers and principals who use creativity and innovation to motivate students to succeed. They show leadership and work with their teaching colleagues to create a positive school climate. They are champions for their schools and for their students.

This year, Mr. Speaker, out of 365 eligible nominations 134 teachers and principals were selected as semifinalists. They will be honoured at two special celebration dinners later this month and will have access to \$1,500 for professional development. From this group of semifinalists 23 final award recipients will be selected and formally honoured at a dinner and awards ceremony with the Education minister in Edmonton on May 30. Of the 23 award recipients 20 will receive the provincial excellence in teaching award and will have access to \$4,000 for professional development to further develop their teaching skills. Three out of the 23 award recipients will receive a Smarter Kids Foundation innovative use of technology award, which includes a comprehensive technology package.

Mr. Speaker, the excellence in teaching awards have been celebrated since 1989, with more than 8,200 teachers nominated and more than 400 who have received awards. I am pleased to rise today to recognize all of the outstanding teachers and principals across this

province and give special congratulations to the 2009 excellence in teaching awards semifinalists.

Thank you.

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

### Prescription Drug Coverage

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition made many good suggestions recently to extend prescription drug coverage in Alberta to all citizens. We need a more extensive public pharmacare program based on models in other Canadian provinces to help reduce rapidly rising pharmaceutical costs and to ensure proper access to medications. The government has failed to listen to the Official Opposition. The government has failed to listen to Alberta seniors. These seniors are outraged at the latest government proposal, which downloads even more costs onto their already stretched household budgets.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to please read a research paper written recently by Aidan Hollis, an associate professor in the department of economics at the University of Calgary. It is titled *Generic Drug Pricing and Procurement: A Policy for Alberta*, by, again, Professor Hollis. Professor Hollis proposes a new approach for Alberta designed to obtain low prices for consumers and fair treatment for pharmacies and manufacturers. Some of the proposals include a descending maximum price with inflation indexing, a cap on rebates or other considerations granted directly or indirectly to pharmacies by manufacturers, an open formulary, a royalty paid to the first generic entrant that successfully challenges a patent. There are ways other than gouging seniors to control prescription costs. Seniors in this province should not have to endure a means test at their local pharmacy before they receive their medication.

Now, in conclusion, I would remind hon. members of what Professor Hollis has stated and noted: "In 2007, the Government of Alberta spent approximately \$887 million on prescription drugs through community pharmacies, while private expenditures . . . totalled \$980 million." About one-quarter of the spending was for drugs that were not patented. There was a \$15 million savings here if we had followed a different model.

Thank you.

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

### South Fish Creek Recreation Complex

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two good-news announcements to share from the southwest quadrant of Calgary. The first involves the South Fish Creek recreation centre, which was originally designed to include four ice surfaces, but to this point only two could be built. Although the centre is not in my constituency, many of my constituents use it and helped to build it. Arenas provide an invaluable opportunity for Albertans of all ages to be active and develop valuable life skills. The members of the SFCRA are to be commended for their time and commitment in acquiring the necessary funds to construct the final two arenas.

The MLA for Calgary-Shaw, our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and I were on hand as our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit delivered a \$3.2 million cheque in matching funds, I might say, from our government's major community facilities program to aid in the completion of this fine project. The expansion will serve more than 400,000 annual users from Calgary, Okotoks, High River, and many other rural areas.

Our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit was also on hand

to deliver 750,000 MCFP dollars to Hull Child and Family Services, and these funds were matched by Hull. They'll be invaluable in the development of a new mental health treatment facility to assist at-risk youth who live with addictions, abuse, and behavioural issues.

Since 1962 Hull has served troubled young people and struggling families and developmentally challenged adults, over 3,000 people every day. They are to be commended for working miracles on a daily basis. Mr. Speaker, there is great news all over Alberta, and with this government's partnerships we don't have to look very far to find them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Pete Eager Fire Hall Wind Energy Project

**Mr. Drysdale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the city of Grande Prairie and Golden Sheep Power Inc. on a partnership that has led to the development of the Pete Eager Fire Hall wind generation project. This exciting initiative has the potential to take the wind and turn it into clean power and profits for residential, agricultural, and commercial use. By utilizing compact wind turbines to harness wind, property owners could potentially produce their own electricity and sell any extra electricity generated back into the grid at market value. At the same time, if you're tied into the electrical grid and should you use more energy than you produce, you can draw from the grid. The Pete Eager Fire Hall project will not only study the noise-to-wind ratio but would also determine if local residents support wind energy production in their community.

I am pleased that this project may help determine how a bylaw can be developed to best accommodate small wind turbines for residential purposes. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans live in one of the most beautiful and healthy natural environments in the world, which is why we are committed to sustaining it. This project is impressive because it's one step closer to reducing our environmental footprint and is another example of this province's entrepreneurial spirit. In this way the project supports this government's commitment to ensuring clean energy production. I always encourage the development of renewable energy, and I look forward to the success of this project.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, momentarily I'm going to have to rise – and I have done it now – on Standing Order 7(7), which states, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." We still have a portion of our Routine to go through. I will anticipate that perhaps members might want to continue the Routine. We need unanimous consent to continue, so I ask the question: is any member here opposed to continuing the Routine? Any member who is, say no. Okay. We're going forward.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

### Members' Statements

*(continued)*

#### Building Leadership for Action in Schools Today

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month I was honoured to have the BLAST team in my hometown of Drayton Valley make an excellent presentation in my constituency office. BLAST, or building leadership for action in schools today, was

formed out of a partnership between the Lung Association and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission in 2002. The BLAST program educates youth throughout the province about the dangers of smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco. Of course, I am very supportive of their efforts.

3:00

The Drayton Valley team is coached by Chris Schoepp and consists of four grade 7 and one grade 8 student: Nick Jodouin, Jessica Gustafson, Tristan Seely, Elyas Patey-Taylor, and Alicia Potter. At BLAST conferences the students learn about current issues about tobacco and work on team-building and leadership skills in order to develop a youth action plan for their community. Following these conferences, the students are responsible for implementing these plans. This BLAST team is presenting to their elected officials and their peers and have also run ads in the local papers.

It is wonderful to see the students involved with the BLAST program getting involved in their community and promoting healthy lifestyle choices throughout the province. Great job to all of them. I look forward to seeing the results of their work and leadership. Our future is certainly in great hands with this young group of team leaders and the youth. Congratulations to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### 783 Air Force Wing

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the 783 Air Force Wing, of which I am proud to have been named an honorary member. I was recently invited by a couple of my constituents, Al and Bev Spielman, to attend the 783 Air Force Wing anniversary banquet on March 21, 2009. Based out of Calgary, the 783 branch has positioned itself as an important part of the broader Air Force Association of Canada.

Established in 1948, the Air Force Association of Canada is identifiable through its support, sponsorship, and encouragement of all aspects of aviation, aerospace, and aeronautics. This directive means that the group has been very active within Calgary, Alberta, and Canada through a variety of projects, including honouring the past traditions of the Canadian Air Force and providing a common bond for all aviation personnel; encouraging improved aviation legislation; actively promoting the future of Canadian military and civil aviation by lobbying for the procurement of improved military aviation equipment; participating in community programs designed towards development of Canadian youth, particularly the air cadet activities; undertaking local community charitable projects; honouring the achievements and efforts of deserving groups, organizations, or individuals associated with Canadian military and civil aviation; fostering and encouraging a spirit of fellowship among those involved in aviation endeavours; and, of course, working for Canadian unity and encouraging responsible citizenship among all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, the 783 Air Force Wing is a prime example of an organization in our province that is working hard to make a difference in our country. I would like to take the time to thank the 783 Wing for their contributions to this province and wish them all the best in the future.

Thank you.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a program from the East Coulee Spring Festival, that occurred this past Saturday in East Coulee, just east of Drumheller. It was a very successful event, designed to raise funds for the local museum. A number of local merchants participated. A number of hotels and bed and breakfast individuals gave away free lodging for the artists, who dedicated their time free of charge for this wonderful fundraising event. Among the various performers was a young, upcoming Alberta musician, Tim Hus, who represented Alberta in our centennial year at the Smithsonian Institute.

My second tabling recognizes the wonderful, talented efforts of the Alberta Ballet company, that has been operating for 40 years in this province. It was an opportunity and a tremendous treat for myself and my grandson to attend the performance this past Thursday in Calgary. The ballet performed *Alice in Wonderland* in Calgary from April 2 to 4 and in Edmonton from March 27 to 28, a wonderful experience for all.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is an outline of hosting expenses over \$600 by ministry for the government of Alberta as publicly disclosed in the *Alberta Gazette* 2004 through to 2008, which I referred to in question period earlier today.

The second tabling I have is a letter that was written by our constituency office on May 27, 2008, to the Chief Electoral Officer over on Kingsway Avenue. It's regarding the conduct of poll 75 in Edmonton-Gold Bar on the March 3, 2008, provincial election date.

My third tabling is an initial response that I received from Elections Alberta, from the Chief Electoral Officer, dated June 2, 2008, in response to my original letter.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the chair wishes to table copies of the written submissions provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in support of her purported question of privilege raised on March 19, 2009, and written submissions by the hon. Government House Leader on the same purported question of privilege. As members will recall, on March 19 I indicated to both and any other members that should they wish to provide written submissions to me, they should be received in my office by March 26, 2009. They were, so I am now prepared to deal with the subject matter that was raised at that time. But, first of all, we're going to deal with the Clerk.

### 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 the hon. Mr. Horner, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Advanced Education and Technology public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, universities and Banff Centre for continuing education for the year ended March 31, 2008, and public colleges and technical institutes for the year ended June 30, 2008.

### Privilege

#### Rights of the Assembly

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, those of you who have ever watched the television series *The Tudors* may find this ruling of interest. On the last day before the spring break the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised a purported question of privilege concerning the regulation-making authority found in Bill 18, the Trade, Investment

and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is currently at committee stage. The member's purported question of privilege is based on section 5 of the bill, which would amend schedule 6.1 of the Government Organization Act by making a subsection 7(2), which would allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations that "may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision."

Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Government House Leader submitted written materials on March 26, 2009, that restate and supplement their arguments made in the Assembly on March 19. The chair has tabled these submissions. The full exchange on this purported question of privilege is found at pages 499 to 503 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

With respect to the technical aspects of Standing Order 15, the Speaker's office received written notice from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on March 19, 2009, at 11:19 a.m. of her intention to raise the purported question of privilege and a brief description of the issue. Accordingly, the two-hour notice requirement of Standing Order 15(2) was met. For the reasons that will follow, the chair will not comment further on whether this matter was raised at the earliest opportunity.

Essentially the member's argument is that the provision in the bill would allow the government to amend legislation that is passed by the Legislature without returning to the Assembly. The member argues that this provision constitutes a breach of the Assembly's privileges, or, alternatively, a contempt of the Assembly.

The type of provision found in Bill 18 that is the subject of this purported question of privilege is often referred to as a Henry VIII clause and, as the chair has discovered, has been the subject of much discussion not only in Canada but across the Commonwealth. The United Kingdom Parliament website indicates that

the House of Lords Select Committee on the Scrutiny of Delegated Powers in its first report of 1992-93 defined a Henry VIII clause as: a provision in a Bill which enables primary legislation to be amended or repealed by subordinate legislation, with or without further Parliamentary scrutiny . . . The clauses were so named from the Statute of Proclamations 1539, which gave King Henry VIII power to legislate by proclamation.

*Erskine May*, 23rd edition, at page 664 states: "power may . . . be conferred, by what is known as a 'Henry VIII clause,' to amend the statute itself by delegated legislation or to amend other statutes."

### 3:10

In conducting research – and we were busy – we discovered that a written question in the British House of Commons asked, "How many Henry VIII clauses were contained in primary legislation enacted in Session 2007-08?" The answer contained in the British House of Commons *Hansard* for March 2, 2009, was that "the Government do not routinely collect or hold information about the number of Henry VIII provisions."

In the arguments raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there is no reference to any instances where such clauses have been ruled a prima facie breach of privilege. Clearly, the references from the United Kingdom and the court decisions in Canada do not indicate that there is any breach of privilege involved when these clauses have been enacted although they may be perceived as objectionable.

Members should be aware that apart from decisions on money bills it is not the role of the chair to rule on the legality or constitutionality of bills. That is the role given to the courts. As noted in the Government House Leader's brief, this principle is cited in *Beauchesne's* sixth edition at paragraph 31(9), where it is stated that "the

failure of the Government to comply with the law is not a matter for the Speaker, but should be decided by the courts." This is also clearly stated at page 21 of *Parliamentary Practice in B.C.*, fourth edition. There have also been rulings in this Assembly on this issue, the most recent being from the chair on March 3, 2005, as noted at page 26 of *Hansard*.

The ability of Parliament or a Legislature to delegate authority to amend statutory provisions was set out as long ago as 1917 in a decision by the British House of Lords.

Accordingly, the chair rules that there is no prima facie question of privilege, and this matter is now concluded with the following addendum. The chair should not be seen as endorsing the use of these types of clauses. There is no doubt that they detract from the role of the Assembly; however, the question as to whether a Henry VIII clause ought to be used is different from the question as to whether it may be used.

## Orders of the Day

### Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

#### Long-term Care Costs

- Q1. Mr. Mason:  
For the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated long-term care facility?

#### Contracted Psychiatric Services

- Q3. Mr. Mason:  
For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by regional health authorities, RHA, broken down by RHA, and what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

#### Physicians in Alberta Towns

- Q5. Mr. Mason:  
What was the number of physicians working in Alberta towns for each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2007-2008?

#### Placements for Children in Government Care

- Q8. Ms Notley:  
For each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 what was the average amount of time taken by Children and Youth Services to find permanent placements for children in permanent government care?

#### Long-term Care Facility Costs

- Q10. Mr. Mason:  
What were the total government subsidies provided to long-term care facilities and the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008?

#### Long-term Care Facilities

- Q12. Mr. Mason:  
How many long-term care facilities, with their respective bed complement, were operating in Alberta on March 31 for the years 2007 and 2008, broken down by regional health



authority and whether the facility and service providers are/were owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a voluntary basis?

#### Alberta's Brand Campaign Costs

- Q14. Mr. Mason:  
How much money has been spent on Alberta's brand campaign in the United States in the fiscal year 2007-2008 and from April 1, 2008, to February 10, 2009?

#### Legal Aid Services

- Q16. Ms Notley:  
For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 on how many occasions were approved legal aid services not provided due to unavailability of counsel?

#### Legal Aid Services

- Q17. Ms Notley:  
For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 what was the average income of people accessing legal aid?

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) written questions are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 2, Mr. Mason.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

#### Designated Assisted Living Costs

- Q2. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.  
For the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated assisted living facility?

**Ms Notley:** I'd like to note that the former MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview asked this question of the government in the spring of 2006, and at that time the minister of health rejected the question on the grounds that the ministry doesn't keep track of that information. However, the minister said at the time that she would be doing

some follow-up work on this to see whether or not we can do what is most important; that is, to be accountable to Albertans for the dollars that are spent in these situations and to see whether there is a value in attaching a valuation to those kinds of care facilities for that particular cost.

It's been three years since the then minister of health agreed to do that work, and the question now is just as pertinent as ever. I would suggest it's a great deal more pertinent given the government's announcement with respect to their continuing care strategy made in December of 2008, a strategy which would see no increase in the number of net long-term care beds in Alberta and, rather, a move to increase supportive living beds, or designated assisted living beds, with the supposed rationale that those beds are the most effective way to care for seniors as they age.

This government, it would appear, is attempting to shift people who would have previously been in long-term facilities to designated assisted living. We would suggest that above and beyond the issues that we do raise quite regularly about the level of care that we would suggest is not provided in those alternative facilities, there's also an issue with respect to cost, we suspect, and the public deserves to know what the costs of these assisted living facilities are on a per-resident basis per month. We know absolutely that the residents themselves will see higher costs with every additional little service,

that they have to pay extra for bathing, that they might have to even pay extra for medication preparation, depending on the circumstances, and certain other personal care efforts that are made on their behalf.

Given that this was something that the previous health minister had suggested might be worthy of providing information to Albertans on and given the increased reliance on this type of care being provided to seniors in lieu of long-term care being the policy of this government, we think that sort of having this information provided to us is even more pertinent than it was when the question was first asked three years ago. We would like to see where the minister has gotten, with that reference back again to the comments made by the previous minister of health in the spring of 2006. I believe it was on April 3, 2006, that the minister of health responded for future reference. So it's on that basis that we are seeking that information.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, do you have a position on this?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that the Legislative Assembly reject this question. The rationale for rejecting this question is that Alberta Health and Wellness does not directly fund designated assisted living. Block funding is provided to Alberta Health Services to finance publicly funded health services provided in designated assisted living sites. Therefore, the information requested is not available.

If the member would like to find further details, she's welcome to go to the RHA audited financial statements. In addition to that is the opportunity to ask questions regarding these expenditures both in the budget estimates that are coming up and if our department appears before Public Accounts.

Again, I would just conclude by saying that the information is not available in the form that is being asked for; therefore, I would ask that the House simply reject this question.

Thank you.

3:20

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want to participate?

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, in supporting this written question I would like to note for the members of this Assembly and pass along our condolences to the hon. member of the third party, who recently lost his father and is very much involved in the grieving process at this moment.

With regard to the information I am hoping that the minister of health, as he has suggested, will be able to provide the information, the intent, which this question has raised. From 2003 through 2008 the government has moved more individuals towards assisted living, which is considerably more expensive than long-term care because the individual is expected to pick up a large portion of the costs in these facilities. Therefore, getting the cost to the individuals, residents, whether it's a private facility or a publicly owned facility, is extremely important. The costs both of long-term care and of assisted living care have risen dramatically.

The Auditor General in the 2004-2005 year reported on the deficiencies he found within a sampling of long-term care programs, and it would be interesting if the Auditor General were given the opportunity to pursue an equal investigation into designated assisted living facilities.

Any information the hon. minister of health can provide in providing a cost average for residents on a monthly basis in

designated assisted living would be much appreciated. If this question lacks the focus the minister is looking for, then I hope he will find it in his heart and in his ability to research the information. This information is important for all Albertans. We're all going to eventually end up in either assisted living or long-term care, and those prices, short of dying on the spot, are going to be extremely important to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I'd just like to add that I think that this information would be very important when we balance it against the fact that presently in the province people are not aging in the right place, and they are not receiving the care that they really need. Designated assisted living is not the answer. Some of them really should be in long-term care. This information would be interesting to balance the cost against the fact that they are simply not receiving the care that they require.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a couple of points. The minister suggested that this was not information that was collected or that they had available, but I do note that the ministry has agreed to respond to our Written Question 1, which is the same kind of question except that in that case it's dealing with long-term care facilities.

I have to say that I'm a bit surprised to discover that that kind of information can be researched and collated and compared for long-term care facilities but not for designated assisted living facilities. That seems to me to be rather odd, particularly given that there was a primary decision made by the government to shift their policy towards choosing designated assisted living over long-term care because of the so-called institutional element of long-term care. It would seem to me that there would have to have been some type of cost-benefit analysis and, thus, a comparison of costs between the two. It's clear that that information is there with respect to long-term care facilities. As well, the minister suggested that we could get that through the estimates process, but again, if we could get it through the estimate process, presumably it's available.

You know, a lot of times these questions come to the Legislative Assembly because we ask the Legislature itself to put its full authority behind our request for that information, so it's on that basis that we ask all members to consider approving our request for this information as it is of great interest to all Albertans and to two seniors in particular.

Thank you.

[Written Question 2 lost]

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

### Student Loan Debt

Q7. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 for Alberta students with student loans what was the average size of their student loan debt at the time they left their respective postsecondary institution?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason we are seeking this information is because we know that Alberta's average tuition is the fourth highest in Canada, that 50 per cent of university

students will graduate with an average of \$20,000 in debt across the country. We know that postsecondary tuition rates have tripled, and we have been made aware of some research stating that postsecondary students who acquire annual debt of \$10,000 or more have only a 20 per cent chance of graduating. We also know, of course, that Alberta has Canada's lowest postsecondary participation rate and that high costs are a significant barrier to young people accessing our postsecondary institutions.

We think that for a number of different reasons the public should know how much debt students in Alberta are graduating with. Parents and children need information like this to plan for the future. We also think that making this information public would make this debate clearer and end speculation based on loan amounts. We also believe that this is public money that is being spent and that the public should know how much is being loaned on average. And we'd like to know ultimately how to assess what the government is providing for university costs and how much we're putting on the shoulders of students.

So it is with those questions in mind that I am seeking support. I believe I'm aware of a suggestion that might be coming from the minister on this to change the wording slightly, and as far as I can tell, that does appear to be a reasonable proposal.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move an amendment to Written Question 7. I do believe that all members have been provided with copies, and the amendment has been provided to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The amendment seeks to clarify terminology used by the Alberta student financial assistance program as well as policies for student loan repayment. The amendment also reflects data that is readily available from the Alberta student financial assistance program. The amendment strikes out "student loan debt at the time they left their respective postsecondary institution" and substitutes "net student loan debt at the time of consolidation, which is six months after they cease being enrolled as full-time students."

The question as originally worded requests information on student loan debts when students leave their postsecondary institution. However, leaving a postsecondary institution is not the key criteria upon which repayment policies are based. Some students leave one postsecondary institution and then enter another either because they're changing their program of study or because they're pursuing another credential. As long as these students continue full-time in a program designated for student financial assistance, they are not required to begin repaying their government student loans. Student aid recipients must begin repaying their government student loan six months after they cease being enrolled as a full-time student.

In addition, my amendment seeks to clarify that the provincial student loan debt to be repaid is net of any loan remission that may be applied. Alberta has in place the loan relief program, that reduces provincial student loans for eligible students. After any loan remission the amount to repay is considered net student debt.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, the motion will read:

For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 for Alberta students with student loans what was the average size of their net student loan debt at the time of consolidation, which is six months after they cease being enrolled as full-time students?

I believe that with the acceptance of these amendments we'll be able to provide clear and accurate information to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, because it is your motion that is being amended, I'll recognize you first. We're talking about the amendment now.

**Ms Notley:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I did allude to in my initial comments, I think that the amendments being proposed make sense in terms of being able to track the information. Ultimately we're being provided the information we are seeking, so I'm quite prepared to support that motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

**Mr. Chase:** Yes. Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the minister of advanced education reframing the request. My only concern – and I would put this to the minister for his advisement – is the cost for part-time students. I know that at the University of Calgary a number of students cannot afford to attend on a full-time basis because they have to have so many jobs to pay for their tuition. So if part-time students' debt could be included as well as full-time – a debt is a debt – that information would be appreciated.

**The Speaker:** Others to participate?  
Then I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 7 as amended carried]

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

#### Protection of Sexually Exploited Children

Q9. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted.  
How many people have been charged under the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act since its implementation?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been provided with a proposed amendment to Written Question 9. Unfortunately, it didn't get to our offices. I'm only seeing it now, so I won't speak to that. I'll just speak in general to the question that I'm seeking to have answered here.

**The Speaker:** That would be good because we have not had an amendment moved yet.

**Ms Notley:** Sorry. That's good.

The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was initially introduced in '98, and in 2007, as we know, it was amended and renamed the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act. Among other amendments the age of the child was raised from 18 to 22, and the children's advocate was named as the primary contact for children. As you may know, the NDP opposition caucus spoke in support of both the 1998 and the 2007 legislation. So what we are now seeking is to get some information with respect to how effectively this legislation has been working. For instance, has it significantly increased the work required of police officers?

When the act was amended in 2007, one MLA in support of it noted that since the implementation of the act in 1998 over 770 children had been helped to leave the street behind. We would also like to know what that number is now. Essentially, the public has a right to know how effective a legislation is at stopping the perpetra-

tors of that exploitation. If the act is not meeting the goals that it was supposed to – i.e., protecting the children – then the public needs to re-engage in the debate about how to best protect sexually exploited children and whether there are other strategies that should perhaps be prioritized.

It's with that background that I'm seeking that information today. Thank you.

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment to the motion on the floor today with respect to Written Question 9 and then move that that be accepted with amendments. The amendments will seek to delete the phrase "people have been charged" and substitute it with "charges have been commenced" and adding "and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA." The question will now read: "How many charges have been commenced under the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA, since its implementation?"

The Justice online information network, with the acronym JOIN, does not collect statistics on the number of people that have been charged but on the number of charges that have been commenced. Though the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was implemented in 1999, JOIN statistics only date back to February 1, 2001. In November of 2007 the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was replaced with the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, so I would suggest that this rephrasing of the question will achieve the hon. member's objective and give clear information to the House with respect to the intent of the question as opposed to the original form of the question.

I trust that the hon. member will appreciate the context of the proposed amendments. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, would you like to comment?

**Ms Notley:** As I mentioned before, I've not had a chance to consider these amendments because they were not provided to my office in time for me to consider them before coming to the House today. It does appear on the surface, with respect to the points made by the hon. Attorney General, that these amendments ought to still provide us with the kind of information that we are seeking.

I guess I'm a touch concerned that if we can't track the number of people who have been charged, if there's not a consistency between the number of charges that are laid each time someone is subjected to the authority of this act, then we wouldn't necessarily get a sense of the scope of its coverage vis-à-vis the number of people that it's actually stopping or attempting to stop or whatever. That is a bit of a concern, that we're unable to track the number of people who are subject to the authority of the act. There's no question that the number of charges generally would also provide some measure of the effectiveness.

As a starting point we'll certainly consider this information. If we have further questions, we'll send them on over. So I will support, then, this proposed amendment to my motion.

**The Speaker:** Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I want to thank the hon. Attorney General for providing the information in the form of the amendments that she has provided. Children are obviously extremely vulnerable to abuse. The government recognized and has recognized the need to protect

children. Just today, for example, the Minister of Children and Youth Services indicated that the government will now be working with hotel and motel managers to attempt to provide them with greater information to protect children who might be abused in those private facilities. It is extremely important, and the amendment recognizes the need for the protection of sexually exploited children.

What is not necessarily clear within this amendment but will hopefully become clearer as we discuss the bill on lengthening the time of stay in protective custody for children involved in acts of prostitution is the rights of the child. The government is wishing to move towards enshrining parental rights in the human rights amendment, and I would ask that the Attorney General work with the member responsible for Children and Youth Services to enshrine at least on an equal basis the rights of children.

I will look forward to receiving, as well, a copy of the information that has been requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Is there anyone else who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for bringing this forward. When they talk just about prostitution, we think about it as a physical act perhaps on a street or in a hotel room. Children are being sexually exploited, yes, in those places, but it's huge on the Internet. I think that this will be able to protect the children that are being exploited through the Internet and on YouTube and all of those other places that aren't obvious to the average person on the street that could then, perhaps, report it. The ones that find it on the Internet are often the ones that are the perverted users.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona like to close the debate on the question as amended, or should I call the question?

**Ms Notley:** Call the question.

[Written Question 9 as amended carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

### 3:40 Assisted Living Facility Costs

Q11. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

What were the total government subsidies provided to assisted living facilities and the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for seeking this information is not completely disconnected from the rationale which I articulated with respect to our seeking information under Written Question 2. The province's new continuing care model talks about additional supportive living spaces, and assisted living falls into that category.

Given that the government is relying so heavily on assisted living as a big part of its new continuing care strategy, it is important to know how much the government is spending to support these

facilities. Assisted living already costs more for seniors, as I've noted before, than being in long-term care and offers a lower level of support. The government seems interested in putting people into assisted living who have previously gone into long-term care. We know that seniors pay more for less, and now we need to know what the government is paying for that same service.

I would also like to point out that Written Question 10 was accepted, and that was the same question but in relation to long-term care facilities. So, again, my hope is that given that these are all part of a continuum of care that is to be provided to our seniors, the government would have at its disposal the same information that it has for long-term care facilities – subsidies, costs, all that kind of thing – as it also has for the broad range of facilities that provide services to seniors under the supportive living space model.

That is the basic rationale for our request. Again, it is information that we require in order to critically analyze the costs and the benefits to Alberta taxpayers as the government moves forward on its continuing care strategy, and it allows us to engage in a more informed debate of the rationale and the motivation, the merits and the demerits, if you will, of this process.

I think that there are, without question – and I suspect that members on the opposite side of the House would agree with me – a number of seniors in the province who are very, very concerned about this issue and about the strategy. I'm sure that many members from all sides of the House have heard a great deal from seniors over the past few months. The more information that we can put out there to these seniors, the better for all of us, I believe.

It's with that spirit in mind that I'm requesting that this information be provided. Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to address Written Question 11, received from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I move that Written Question 11 be amended to read: "What were the total government operating grants provided to provincial lodges, and what were the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the years 2003 to 2007?" These amendments allow us to respond by focusing on seniors' lodges as these are the only type of supportive living facilities that receive operating grants directly from government. Lodges report accommodation and related operating expenses for room and board to government through annual audits.

I'm also recommending amendments to the time frame requested to align with the most recent audit, received in 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** We have an amendment. I'll again recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona because she moved the motion.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I do appreciate the time taken to respond to my motion by the minister. However, I can't support these particular amendments for a couple of different reasons. First of all, assisted living and provincial lodges are two different things, and we're not wanting to limit the request for information to simply provincial lodges. As well, we're not simply seeking information about operating grants. On the contrary, we are looking for information with respect to any nature of government funding.

The continuing care strategy lists the different kinds of continuing care available in the province. Lodge living is listed as level 2 on the supportive living spectrum. Assisted living is listed as level 3 on

the spectrum. Enhanced living, which includes designated assisted living, is listed as level 4. There are obviously very different kinds of care.

As well, the amendment to change “subsidies” to “operating grants” is not something that we can accept because it would then not include capital grants, which we are also interested in receiving information on as that, of course, impacts quite significantly on costs to the taxpayer as well as the overall efficacy of this particular strategy. For that reason we are looking for the broader amount of information that we were first requesting in our Written Question 11.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons I am having trouble with the amended motion begins with the word “subsidies.” For example, a member of the Health Resource Group, who owns three seniors’ homes down in Red Deer that are privatized, is receiving not only operating grants, but he’s receiving subsidies not only as the owner but as the consultant to the government on the running of these facilities. By taking out “subsidies” and saying “operating grants,” his consulting fees I don’t believe would be captured under the term “operating grants.” It’s important to note that the Health Resource Group got a very good deal on what was formerly the Grace hospital in Calgary.

Now, with regard to the second portion of the amendment, striking out “assisted living facilities” and substituting “provincial lodges,” I don’t believe that “provincial lodges” completely captures the designation that is being looked for in terms of funding assisted living facilities. As was previously noted, those operating costs are borne to a large extent by the seniors and their families because every single piece of toilet paper, any toothpaste, and any toiletry items are accounted for and billed to the residents or to their families, and therefore there are considerable costs involved. I’m not sure that by limiting it to just provincial lodges, that will be covered.

I do appreciate the hon. Seniors and Community Supports minister for talking about her inability to provide 2008 statistics at this time. Obviously, that’s not something that is available, but I would hope, even if the amendments are for some reason voted down, that the minister will follow through and provide the information requested for the 2008 year and table that as soon as it becomes available. I’m assuming that that will happen.

As it stands now, more information has been requested, and I believe more information is required to satisfy the original intent of Written Question 11. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will not be supporting this amendment because I don’t believe that it’s getting at what the question really is. I think it’s sidetracking it a little bit.

The other thing is that the original question was asking for assisted living facilities, and this one is asking for lodges, and these are totally different. According to what I’m hoping we all understand as definitions throughout this province, which I’ve been asking for for a long time so that we all are speaking the same language and that our definitions are province-wide, these are two different entities.

I think that by having these amendments, it’s not getting at the actual question. We all have to remember that regardless of how the money is put in, whether it’s grants or however it gets put in, a

public dollar is a public dollar. Even if it’s one public cent, it should be accountable, and we should be able to have that information whenever we ask for it.

**The Speaker:** Are there additional participants, or should I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Is there additional debate, then, on the motion as amended, or shall I call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Written Question 11 as amended carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

### Contracted Psychiatric Clinical Services

Q13. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities, RHA, broken down by RHA, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for this request is as follows. In his 2005-2006 annual report the Auditor General stated that “the basis for allocating the mental health funding to the [regional health authorities] is inconsistent with the population-based methodology.” We need to make sure that mental health treatment is accessible in all parts of Alberta, and a big part of that is having enough psychiatrists in all regions of the province.

Now, in the Auditor General’s October 2008 report he recommended that

Alberta Health Services should eliminate the gaps in mental health service across the province. By gaps in service, we mean a program that either does not exist or has a long wait time. Poorly coordinated care also signifies a gap in services, resulting in clients not getting the care they need or even “falling through the cracks.”

By receiving this information we have something with which to compare the current and future numbers of psychiatrists providing mental health services across the province. This way we can see if the switch from regional health boards to the superboard has had a positive or, conversely, a detrimental effect on staffing of mental health care.

We’ve had the Auditor General identify at least twice that there is a concern with respect to the accessibility of mental health care on a regional basis within the province. We have also had a number of people express more recently that there is actually a concern about the provision of mental health services all across the province, not just on a regional basis but on an absolute basis. I personally am of the view that it’s basically the next crisis in our health care system or one that is in play right now that we are not even fully apprised of yet.

It’s for this reason that we think this information needs to be provided so that, again, as members of the Assembly we can keep the government accountable and track the way in which this matter progresses forward and also because, of course, there are a number of people within our population who would be interested in finding

out this information because they are themselves fully engaged in advocating for improvements to the system under which we provide mental health services to Albertans in need of them. So it is for this reason that we are seeking to have this information provided to us.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness I would like to propose an amendment to this motion. The members, I believe, have a copy of the amendment in front of them. The amendment reads that Written Question 13 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out “number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities . . . broken down by [regional health authority]” and substituting “number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry, broken down by regional health authority”; and (b) by striking out “, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board.”

The amended question would read then:

For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry, broken down by regional health authority?

Mr. Speaker, the data that Alberta Health and Wellness collects does not include psychiatrists contracted directly by the regional health authority or by the Alberta Mental Health Board. That information would have to be collected directly from those respective organizations. By amending the question, we’re able to provide the data that Alberta Health and Wellness has regarding psychiatry. The Health and Wellness data that we provide is based on fee-for-service claims and services provided under the alternative relationship program.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about this amendment to this request for a variety of reasons. Again, it is always concerning when we hear that the government does not have access to this information and that, instead, some not really so arm’s-length organization would have that information. Particularly, given that we’ve just gone through this whole process of consolidating these not so arm’s-length organizations into one body that, presumably, has a much more accountable relationship to members of the executive across the way, I am a little concerned that that so-called distinction in the relationship is being used as a means of ensuring that we don’t get the full information that we require.

There’s no question that the amended motion would still provide us with some important information in terms of giving us the number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry. However, I am not clear on whether that would allow for general practitioners who provide certain medical services to actually be covered under that so that you’ve got your GP, for instance, prescribing some type of psychiatric medication. If that’s the case, then we don’t get to the heart of the issue that this question is trying to address, which is the equitable distribution of mental health services across the province on a regional basis.

I suspect that there are more than a few physicians out there, particularly in rural areas, who in great frustration and in attempting to do the best they can for their patients will prescribe to them and treat them for psychiatric ailments while, at the same time, being very frustrated at the inability to access the psychiatric specialty. I would actually be quite interested to hear whether this amendment would cover that situation or whether the amendment still would provide simply for an amount that is paid out to a psychiatrist even

if we’re not breaking it down by the number of psychiatrists but, rather, are breaking it down by the number of dollars. If I could know that what we’re talking about are psychiatrists, then I would be okay with the amendment, but if what we are talking about are GPs doing psychiatric work, then that is a problem for us.

4:00

The second issue relates to the Alberta Mental Health Board. The reason we included the Alberta Mental Health Board in our original question is because, frankly, the history of the Alberta Mental Health Board and the degree to which it has successfully integrated with different regional health boards across the province is varied and inconsistent. So there is no question that there are some regions within which the Alberta Mental Health Board actually was providing the majority of services and where the integration between the services of the Alberta Mental Health Board and the services provided by the regional health authority was done differently from region to region. We are concerned, then, about withdrawing that amendment from this question because, again, we cannot be getting the full story without including the Alberta Mental Health Board.

We understand, of course, that now the Alberta Mental Health Board is part of Alberta Health Services, so it would seem to me that it would be quite possible for Alberta Health Services to get that information from the Alberta Mental Health Board. That’s what I meant, that the Alberta Mental Health Board is part of the large board and that all of that information could be made available to Alberta Health Services.

So with those concerns identified, because the regional distribution of mental health services within our health care system is a critical piece of information that we need to have before us because it impacts directly on how well the government is doing in providing one of the most important types of care that it provides and because the amendment may well negate our ability to distinguish between the psychiatric provision of mental health services and general practitioner provision of mental health services, we cannot accept that amendment.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a variety of concerns with regard to the amendment as well. Mental illness strikes 1 in 5 Albertans. Of those who are struck by mental illness, it occurs to over 50 per cent of the individuals prior to age 14. As a person who is responsible for both Education and Children and Youth Services I am concerned about the accurate reporting not only of the information but, obviously, the treatment that is being reported on.

There was a degree of authority and autonomy given to local regional health authorities. They delivered, obviously, the services locally and were accountable for those services. What is now happening is that regional health authorities are being replaced by a superboard, and the superboard has not only taken over the responsibilities for cancer and AADAC, but the Mental Health Board falls under the auspices now of the superboard. I’m not sure that the new superboard will be able to do a better job in ensuring the equivalency of treatment that local authorities were able to provide, whether through the Mental Health Board or through their regional health authority.

An example – and I don’t know if it fits into the category of mental illness, but it is certainly an illness of the mind – is autism. I have been working with a mother who was formerly in Medicine Hat who had been requesting service dog support for her severely

afflicted child. Unfortunately, she was not able to get those services. However, the hours of respite care and specific treatment that were provided in Medicine Hat were longer than those in Red Deer. So the need to know the specifics of where we've been in order to evaluate where we're going is extremely important.

Also, in terms of the second part, the striking out portion of the amendment, the Auditor General pointed out concerns in his 2007-2008 report with regard to the superboard assuming these services but not having clearly defined goals, so he wasn't able to judge as to whether the superboard taking over control of mental health would be able to arrive at goals that weren't clearly defined. Therefore, I'm not convinced that amendments (a) and (b) to Written Question 13 are going to provide the necessary information.

I believe that the number of children alone that were seen under the auspices of care for mental illness was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 58,000, so just for children alone their treatment and the supervision of their treatment is extremely important. If I have calls to my office with regard to mental treatment to the extent I've received on a whole variety of other health issues unable to be answered anymore at the local level – if we add mental illness to this lack of accountability, then I fear for the future of treatment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my concerns about this has been brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, where in fact GPs are acting as quasi-psychiatrists. Certainly, some of the smaller mental treatments can be handled, but I think that it's very important that we know the number of psychiatrists. I want to know not only the number of psychiatrists but also what their specialties are.

I don't believe that we have enough child psychiatrists in this province, nor do I believe that we have enough geriatric psychiatrists. A psychiatrist is a psychiatrist, but in fact that's not true. Each one of these has their own specialty. Often seniors particularly could well end up going to a GP and being told, "Well, it's just getting old," when in fact it really is a psychosis that, if properly diagnosed by a geriatric psychiatrist, could be treated, and we could save a great deal of despair and particularly depression in our seniors. So I think it's very important that we get the number of the psychiatrists and also what their specialties are.

**The Speaker:** Others to participate, or should I call the question on the amendment?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Now, is there further discussion with respect to this matter, or does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wish to close the debate?

**Ms Notley:** Yes, I will close debate.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Proceed.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. I just wanted to close debate with one brief excerpt from the 2008 Auditor General's report. After spending several pages identifying gaps in the provision of mental health care across the province and shortages with respect to the quality and the scope of mental health care in different areas, he makes a number of

recommendations to improve the system and ends finally with this one:

Last, there should be greater accountability for the mental health service delivery system. We view accountability in terms of a cycle, beginning with planning an activity, delivering it, monitoring operations, and regularly assessing the success of operations with a view to enhancing the service.

It is with that in mind that I believe this information is a critical piece in ensuring that this type of process can start to occur and we can start to improve the services which have been previously identified as needing some intervention.

Thank you.

[Written Question 13 as amended carried]

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

#### 4:10 Student Loan Repayment

Q18. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 how long did the average person with Alberta student loans take to pay the loans off, and how much interest did they pay on the loans?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated before, we have the fourth-highest tuition rate in Canada. Fifty per cent of university students graduate with an average of \$20,000 in debt. Approximately 28 per cent of university graduates and 34 per cent of college graduates who borrowed reported difficulties in repaying their student debt. Since 1990 postsecondary tuition rates have tripled. Again, with the growing level of debt, the completion rate of postsecondary students is declining.

The public needs to know what a burden student loan debt is to those coming out of postsecondary as it does also ultimately limit their ability to do such things as buy a house, travel, or start a family. It's with this issue and background in mind that we are requesting to have this information provided to us.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move an amendment to Written Question 18. I believe that all members have been provided with copies of the amendment, and they have been provided to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The amendment to Written Question 18 reflects available data by striking out " , and how much interest did they pay on the loans." Alberta's student financial assistance program has data readily available to answer the first part of the question. Information can be provided for the fiscal years requested on students who finished repaying their student loans and how long it took them to repay. However, the interest portion of repaid loans is not included in the data set. Other data is available on the aggregated interest paid by students annually, but it is not linked to individual student loans and the repayment period. Alberta's student financial assistance program would only be able to provide estimates of interest paid on individual loans based on assumptions about amortization periods and interest rates, which, of course, fluctuate over time.

It's also an important consideration that students are not required to pay any interest while they are in full-time studies. Government covers all interest costs during this period, providing significant cost savings to students. As the opposition members are probably aware,

Alberta lowered interest rates on student loans in 2007. Along with Newfoundland Alberta now has the lowest student loan interest rate in Canada, down to the prime lending rate on floating loans, which I'm sure everyone is quite aware is quite low at this time.

Thus the motion will read, if amended: "For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 how long did the average person with Alberta student loans take to pay the loans off?" By accepting these amendments, accurate information can be provided in a timely fashion to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, if you wish to respond.

**Ms Notley:** Yes. Thank you. I appreciate the minister's response and, you know, commitment to providing some of that information as reflected in the amendment, so that is good. I'm taking him at his word that it's not possible to provide the information that we requested as it was worded. I would however have been interested in getting the information on the aggregate amount of interest paid if that was possible. He did mention in his comments that that was possible, so that would provide us more information than we were previously seeking. Perhaps if there was some other source where that information is already available, that would be great. If there is not, then I would prefer to see that reflected in the amendment as written.

Those are my comments.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I, too, appreciate what the minister of advanced education is willing to provide to this House in terms of answering Written Question 18. The amendment knocks off one-half of what is being asked for. The amendment deals only with time, and it doesn't deal with the money aspects. It's the money aspects that are most relevant, particularly to students who are taking a long time to pay off a considerable amount of money. The minister did mention some of the difficulties associated with it, but even if he amortizes the expenses and provides a ballpark figure, it will provide recognition to both opposition parties and, more importantly, to students that the costs associated with getting a postsecondary education in Alberta are on the rise.

I also appreciated the fact that Alberta, as the minister noted, as recently as 2007 has the lowest lending rate for the government. But the advantage of that reduced loan rate has been impacted, if not lost, by increased tuition costs. If we go back to 2004, Premier Klein boasted that Alberta would have the lowest tuition rate, and if there were any additional costs, the students were to bring them to the Premier and he would cover the difference. Well, unfortunately, that notion went out the window when the Premier left office.

Therefore, in the amendments only half of the question is being answered, and that's: how long does it take an average person with Alberta student loans to pay those loans off? What is as important is how much money was finally required, including amortized interest over the time periods of 2004-2005 through 2007-2008, so we can get a comparison and validate postsecondary students' concerns that getting an education in this province is becoming exceedingly more difficult based on tuitions that rose this year, for example, at the University of Calgary by 4 per cent and similarly at other colleges and universities.

Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and members from the loyal opposition met with representatives of CAUS and the college version, ACTISEC, to talk about the problems and, of course, the

cost of tuition, the availability of loans, and the fact, for example – and this was brought up in question period – that parents are considered part of the formula. What a parent makes is taken into account before a student is eligible for a loan.

Time and money are both equally important. I would appreciate the minister doing his best, as he somewhat suggested, to provide at least a ballpark amortized figure to assist with the answering of this very important question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Others?

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Further debate, then, on the question as amended or shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate or shall I just go to the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Written Question 18 as amended carried]

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

#### Contracted Legal Services

Q19. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 what was the average hourly rate paid by the government when it contracted out to the legal community for government legal services, excluding legal aid services?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue that we are pursuing information about here relates to the question of the cost of legal services, not only to the government but to all Albertans. In essence, we are looking for a comparison between what the government pays through its legal aid program and what is paid when it's the government's issues that are being represented. I don't know exactly what that number is, but I do suspect that it is a great deal more than the \$84 an hour that is currently being paid out as a legal aid rate. In my view, we need to look at there being some equity there.

4:20

People who require legal aid most often require legal aid because they are within a court setting coming up against an arm of government. It is most likely the case that people who have low income are in fact having conflict with government in its role as an administrator. It is, in my view, quite ironic that we might have cases where people are seeking legal support at the rate of \$84 an hour while at the same time having to confront agents of government who may well be paid two or sometimes three times that. I don't know what the going rate is that the government pays to its lawyers when it contracts out for anything other than legal aid services, but I suspect it's probably in and around the \$200 per hour range, probably more. I suspect it's safe to say that it's probably three times the rate of legal aid.

Of course, what that says is that legal aid for all intents and purposes is in a failed state. It does not work, and it does not for any true purposes exist effectively in this province. What has happened is that when we pay legal aid out at one-third of what the going rate is, then the only people that accept legal aid cases are those who are doing it for one reason and one reason only, and that is charity. As far as I'm concerned, access to our justice system is a fundamental right which we should all work very, very hard to maintain. When



the only way one can get access to their justice system is through the charity of – wait for it, everybody – a lawyer, then, you know, I think we have some problems.

While I have tremendous respect for those lawyers who do legal aid work, whether because they've made a choice to significantly sacrifice their own income or whether because they allocate a certain number of hours per month to do legal aid work at that significantly reduced rate – in both cases I have tremendous respect and appreciation for those lawyers – the reality is that there are not enough of them. There are simply not enough of them. You need only go to the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada to know that, in fact, we have a tremendous crisis in this country and that we no longer have equal access to justice in any part of the country and certainly not in Alberta.

In order to generate more debate around this issue – although it seems really arcane and all legalistic, those of us who went to law school actually think that the justice system has a fundamentally important role to play in our society. As a result, you can't really hang your hat on that particular hanger if what you're going to then do is admit that those people with a low income effectively have no access to that system.

All of this, then, turns to the question of: what does the government perceive as a reasonable amount of money to pay to lawyers when the government itself hires lawyers for its own work? As much as we have fabulous staff within the ministry of the Attorney General who do a great deal of legal work for the government and who work on staff at rates which probably make it much more affordable for the government, the reality is that they do still on occasion contract out to private lawyers. I believe it is in our best interest to have an understanding of the rate at which those other lawyers are paid.

We often have cases, for instance, in the child protection scenario where the government may well contract out to a lawyer who may earn \$200, \$250 – [interjection] or more, I'm told; okay, it's been a long time since I've been working in the private sector – \$300, \$350 an hour; who knows? The family who is trying to secure for themselves a fair hearing about whether or not their child should stay with them or move into foster care is required to secure that fair hearing through a lawyer who will only be paid \$84 an hour. What that says to me is that we have set up an inherently imbalanced and unfair system, as much as we all say that justice should be equal.

There's a big picture that I am getting at by asking this question, but I think it's a fundamentally important question that needs to be addressed. It's through that background that I think one way to start the discussion is by finding out not the specific amounts paid to specific firms – we already know through the blue book what firms get paid by this government – but the question is: on average what is the hourly rate being paid? Not what the policy is but just what on average is paid: I think that's a reasonable piece of information for us to receive in this Assembly so that we can proceed, hopefully, to have discussions about how we might make a meaningful change to our system of legal aid in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General I think should have a position on this.

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the discussion the hon. member has raised with respect to legal aid. I would respectfully suggest that that is a different discussion. I'd be very happy to have that discussion, and perhaps we can continue that once the budget is introduced tomorrow and as we carry on with those discussions.

I would say at this point that I would ask the members of this House to consider rejecting this question. While there are instances where legal counsel is required, Alberta Justice does not track the average hourly rate paid by the government of Alberta for legal services. There are different lawyers that are hired for different purposes, for different levels of expertise and different training. In seeking the services of outside counsel, Alberta Justice's goal is primarily to ensure that quality advice is received at a reasonable cost.

I certainly take the hon. member's point with respect to legal aid. There are a number of discussions that are taking place right now between the government and the Law Society with respect to making that a more constructive system, and some of the issues that you've raised are certainly issues that both the government and the profession have identified and will be addressing. But I would respectfully say that I don't think this gets to the heart of the matter.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I was flipping through my papers, Mr. Speaker, trying to find an amended approach, but clearly from the hon. Attorney General this is an all-or-nothing circumstance.

It's extremely important that I not be portrayed as seeking further employment for my extremely intelligent, hard-working son-in-law Vivek Warrior, who has recently become a partner of Bennett Jones in Calgary. Nor am I seeking further legal employment for my brother, who is a member of the firm of Miles Davison, also operating in Calgary. But I am concerned about accountability in terms of tracking the funding. I believe the government should be responsible for tracking the funding. If the discussion is going to occur on another day and the information will be provided as to why people on legal aid services receive – and the lawyers working in legal aid are so underpaid that it requires only the most altruistic of individuals to take on these cases. As it was indicated, justice should be blind, and it should be available to all individuals on an equal basis.

In November of 2007 I put forward Motion 511, calling for a unified family court. The motion was brought forward to make it a unified family court process, and the intention was to not only increase the efficiency and speed with which custody cases were heard but also to decrease the expenses in the convoluted system that is currently in place, where the Court of Queen's Bench has the responsibility for divorce and our provincial court basically deals with every other aspect of children and youths' legal well-being.

4:30

I have grave concerns about not only the expense that is paid out in the name of the taxpayer for the prosecution of a case which removes a child and places them into the permanent custody of the state, into a foster home potentially to be adopted. I have seen and experienced in court the 43rd time when a set of grandparents entered the court, having paid over \$265,000 of what should be their grandchildren's inheritance in order to have custody of those children. It's an emotional injustice as well as a fiscal injustice that we do not have sufficient judges and sufficient lawyers who are paid at a fee that recognizes their talents, so that individuals who are forced because they lack the resources to rely on the services of legal aid should be shortchanged not by the intent of the lawyer but by the caseload of the lawyer who is willing to undertake a portion of their practice in serving the needs of legal aid.

I would ask the Attorney General that if she is not prepared to track the amount of money that is going from taxpayers and flowing

through the legal system, she could at least at some point later account for the total costs of legal aid provisions as separated from the costs of paying for the prosecution and of judges. It's an extremely large amount, and I'm hoping that at some point the unified family court motion, Motion 511, will actually be legislated as opposed to just simply recognizing its intent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then, to close the debate? Proceed.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I just would like to rise and say that I am a little disappointed that the hon. Attorney General is not prepared to provide us with this information. I am terribly, deeply disappointed. I do believe that it is actually quite relevant to the issue at hand. I think that if the government is going to try and suggest that the legal aid system is anywhere close to being effective, then a reasonable measurement would be what the government itself has found through its own experience that it must pay in order to secure, as the minister herself acknowledged, the most specialized or skilled services in a particular area. I'm sure that people who are compelled to access legal aid would also like to be able to seek out the most specialized and skilled lawyer in the particular area in which they need legal services.

I know that, in fact, in the blue books there is a complete listing of the private firm expenditures of this government, so I'm quite surprised, frankly, that it would be anything other than a simple amount of a few hours to find out the average hourly rate, even a range for the average hourly rate, paid to lawyers who work on behalf of government. No one is suggesting that the government doesn't in certain cases or at certain times need to pay what the market demands and doesn't at certain times need to pay, you know, amounts that the average person might think are a bit ridiculous, but I do think that you cannot have a discussion about provision of legal aid without acknowledging what the current going rate is that the government has to pay for its own services.

I am disappointed that that information has not been provided. I suspect it wouldn't take a great deal for it to be made available, and I certainly hope that the minister will give some thought to how that might be made available between now and the time at which her ministry comes up for discussion in estimates so that we can perhaps review the ability to have that information provided to the public at that time.

Thank you.

[Written Question 19 lost]

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

### Supportive Living Facilities

Q20. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. How many supportive living facilities, including assisted living facilities, lodges, enhanced lodges, seniors' complexes, and group homes, and related number of beds were operating in Alberta for each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, broken down by regional health authority and by whether the facility is/was owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a nonprofit basis?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for seeking this information, again, is not entirely dissimilar from other questions that were focusing on trying to get more global information about the state of supportive living costs and resources across the province.

The province's new continuing care model talks about additional supportive living spaces, and assisted living falls into that category. Meanwhile the government plans to create no new long-term care beds in the province but, rather, to simply maintain and upgrade the 14,500 that currently exist, and of course this is in the face of there being roughly 1,500 people on wait-lists now and having every demographic expert in the province clearly stating that without question that number will go up over the course of the next few years. Indeed, I believe we have heard recently from Alberta Health Services that that number went up quite dramatically just in Calgary, so we know that there is a very significant problem. The Premier had, of course, during the last election campaigned on the notion of opening 600 new long-term care beds. Unfortunately, that particular plan has gone nowhere.

Meanwhile private operators have a lot to gain from the expansion of supportive living facilities, and we as taxpayers want that information so that we can see what share of the supportive living market they have had compared to the nonprofit and publicly operated shares and whether the number of privately operated facilities is increasing, again a legitimate question for Albertans to want answers to.

That is the basic rationale behind why it is we are seeking information in response to Written Question 20.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. The government is proposing an amendment to this question. The amendment has been circulated. I won't waste the House's time by reading it in detail, but the effect of the amendment is that Written Question 20 would now read:

How many licensed supportive living facilities and seniors' lodges were operating in Alberta for the fiscal year 2007-2008, and what was their respective capacity (number of residents), broken down by regional health authority and by whether the facility received public funding or not?

Mr. Speaker, in April 2007 we began licensing supportive living facilities for compliance with accommodation standards. Licences are based on the number of residents in a supportive living facility, not on the number of units or beds in the facility. The recommended amendment allows us to respond accordingly.

Prior to April 1, 2007, information on supportive living facilities was collected on a voluntary basis, and there was not legislative authority to collect such information. As the data from April 2007 onwards is more accurate, we are requesting amendments to the dates contained in the original question. The government does not collect information about whether an operator is private or nonprofit. The recommended amendments allow us to answer the question by focusing on whether a facility receives public funding or not. I therefore move the amendment as presented.

4:40

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll give you first opportunity.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I do appreciate the efforts made by the minister, and I do believe that certainly amendments (a) through (c) simply improve it and are better written, so that's great. I'm a little concerned that we wouldn't be getting as much information as we had been seeking through what I guess is, well, (d) – in my amendment it appears as (c) twice, but what I think is (d) – the striking out of fiscal year 2006-2007. But I will take you at your word. If that information is simply not available, then I guess it's not available.

I am concerned about striking out the distinction between whether the facility is publicly or privately operated or functioning as a nonprofit. I think that we know that the private facilities will receive public funding. We know that the nonprofits will receive public funding, and of course we know that the publicly owned will receive public funding. So the question of public funding will not specifically identify the breakdown within our province between the nonprofit, private-sector, and public-sector facilities.

I think these are completely legitimate questions to be asking, and I am a bit shocked that the government wouldn't actually know what the breakdown is between private-sector facilities, public-sector facilities, and nonprofit facilities. Certainly, I know that when I worked in that industry as a staff member for a union, I could tell you which facilities were private sector, which were nonprofit, and which were public sector, so I find it really a little bit of a stretch to believe that the staff within the minister's area are unable to also identify the difference between a public, private, and nonprofit facility. I am concerned about that. I suppose that if we get the list, we can probably do it ourselves, but the idea was that I was pretty sure the government already had that information.

For that reason I am not in support of the amendment, primarily because of the last amendment which is being made, that does not give us that breakdown between public, private, and nonprofit. I do, however, appreciate that the remainder of the motion will be presumably accepted by the minister.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the hon. member's request for information she included group homes, and I know that there are a variety of different types of group homes, some for individuals with physical or mental disabilities, some for seniors. Where I get directly involved is with group homes for children and youth who have run into difficulties and have been basically put into a custodial circumstance by the province.

But the area that I want to refer specifically to in the amendment has to do with the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports' section (a), where she would like to add "licensed" before "supportive living facilities." The fact that some facilities are allowed to operate without being licensed is of major concern to me, and although I have received less than collegial support in my concerns over the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, that isn't the crux of the matter. The AARC facility has a business licence as opposed to having a professionally accredited licence that would recognize it as a legitimate treatment facility for children suffering addictions or extended to those suffering behavioural problems. Not all children at the AARC facility are there because of addictions.

Now, because this organization receives \$300,000 in yearly grants from the government, I would think that there would be greater concern about the types of treatment that were offered, the fact that it is not a residential treatment centre, the fact that it is not subject to external inspection because of the overnight monitoring of children in externally locked, barred bedrooms, where their door monitor is another junior in a vulnerable position. It's the fact that the facility isn't licensed. I have never claimed in debate that the intentions of the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre weren't good intentions. The fact that the minister is planning on tabling, if not already having done so, testimonials from grateful students who have graduated from the program or the . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I'm really sorry to interrupt, but

you've got to find the relevancy here in what you're talking about and what this motion is about. Okay? You've simply got to find it.

**Mr. Chase:** Yes. Okay. I will. The relevancy, Mr. Speaker, which you're searching for is under the term "licensed." I'll briefly summarize my original argument that all facilities that deal with the treatment of youth or seniors or individuals with disabilities should be licensed, supervised, and overseen by this government.

If taxpayer money goes into the facilities and Albertans are being treated within them, there has to be a much greater level of accountability, and that is part of what Written Question 20 is about. I don't believe that the various amendments that have been provided, whether they be (a), (b), (c), or (d), address the concerns. Albertans deserve transparency and accountability, particularly those who are placed into the care of facilities. Their well-being and their care should be of utmost importance to all Albertans and especially to this government, that is responsible for the individuals' well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few comments on the record on amendment (b). They want to take out the words "assisted living facilities, lodges, enhanced lodges," et cetera, and substitute "seniors' lodges." Again, it's an argument that I have spoken to before. I think this is far too narrow. Even if they'd used the words "continuing care," what we understand to be under continuing care would include all of the assisted living, et cetera. But to just say seniors' lodges is far too narrow a scope, and I don't think that it will get at the answers which the question was meant to address.

**The Speaker:** Additional people who would like to participate, or should I call the question with respect to the amendment?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, would you like to conclude the debate, or should I call the question?

**Ms Notley:** Question.

[Written Question 20 as amended lost]

### Motions for Returns

[The Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

#### Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

M1. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing a copy of all 2007-2009 utilization plans for the Mazankowski Heart Institute and any records of how many wards and beds are currently vacant in the institute.

#### 4:50 Ministerial Foreign Travel Plans

M5. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing copies of all current protocols surrounding the proposal and selection process for approving ministers' foreign travel plans.

### Assisted Living Facilities

- M7. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing a list of facilities in Alberta whose designation changed from long-term care facility to assisted living facility between April 1, 2001, and December 31, 2008.

### Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee

- M8. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing a copy of the final report and recommendation of the Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

### Agreement on Internal Trade

- M9. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing a copy of the agreement signed by the Premier on January 16, 2009, at the first ministers' meeting regarding amendments to the agreement on internal trade.

### Midwifery Services

- M20. Mr. Mason:  
A return showing copies of all government plans to increase the number of midwives practising in Alberta between February 1, 2008, and February 10, 2009.

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19.

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

### Assisted Living Facilities

- M2. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports or plans prepared between January 1, 2007, and February 10, 2009, regarding the future creation or expansion of assisted living facilities.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for that has been somewhat canvassed already in my previous remarks with respect to our concerns around the government's continuing care strategy and their purported plans to rely on assisted living facilities as an alternative to providing the number of new long-term care beds that were either promised in the election or, more importantly, are required by the roughly 1,500 people who are in hospital beds at this point, waiting for those beds.

As a result, we are now interested in assessing what the extent and breadth is of plans to create new assisted living facilities as well as to determine whether those plans would involve an expansion into and by the public sector, whether they would involve an expansion into or by the nonprofit sector, or whether or not the intention is that this all be done through particular members of the private sector.

There has been a great deal of talk about the expansion of these services and the expansion of the assisted living facilities, but we have not yet been given a global picture of what the plans are and where those facilities would be and the state of the government's current plans with respect to this issue.

As I've already stated, it's a matter that is of very high public concern not only within our seniors' communities but, frankly, within the homes and families of many, many Albertans, all of whom are concerned about the health and the future of their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, not only of just themselves but of those who they care deeply for.

This continuing care strategy represents a very significant shift in gears by the government with respect to plans for caring for our seniors, and it is for this reason that we are pursuing as much information as we can possibly get on how far along the plans are and what they look like at this point and whether or not there is good reason to believe that they will actually have the capacity to solve the problems which we have discussed and identified repeatedly within this House to the government on behalf of those people.

It's for those reasons that we are seeking this information, and I urge my colleagues to support our motion in this regard.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. The minister recommends that the House reject this motion. I think the member actually answered a great deal of the rationale in her discussion of the motion itself when she indicated that much of the assisted living capacity is the purview of the private sector. So the plans and reports that the member is seeking would simply not exist, and that kind of information would not be available to provide to the member.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I appreciate the hon. Deputy Government House Leader providing a response, but it amazes me that private facilities don't have to file their plans with the government, especially if they're receiving either operational grants or some form of subsidy or consultation fees, that this information would not be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, our seniors' advocate, has frequently raised the issue of aging in place and recognizing the dignity of seniors and respecting family wishes of their mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandfathers, and so on, having the opportunity to continue to be well cared for in a facility within their locale. Having the details that have been requested in Motion for a Return 2 would provide a degree of planning potential for families whose senior loved ones are at the point of requiring some extra support either in the more expensive version of assisted living or in long-term care.

The government seems very willing to report on a whole variety of information, including individual schools' standard achievement test scores. I would suggest that reporting this valuable information to the public for future decisions with regard to aging in place and dignity would be able to be provided, so I'm disappointed that this motion for a return has been rejected.

**The Speaker:** Others?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you want to conclude the debate?

**Ms Notley:** Yeah, I do.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. Yes. Very briefly, I guess, my final point is that I, too, am a little concerned by the rationale provided by the Deputy Government House Leader with respect to why this motion for a return could not be followed through on. It may well be that assisted living ultimately is the primary purview of the private sector, but the service it provides is in the primary purview of the public interest. It also forms the foundation of a much ballyhooed continuing care strategy which was announced last December as this

government's answer to the crisis in aged care and the crisis with respect to caring for our seniors. So I am quite concerned that we would now say: "Well, we can't provide you information on what we planned because even though it's the foundation of our whole way to deal with this crisis, it's going to be done by the private sector. So how could you ever expect us to have any insight into what's been planned?"

Now, this, of course, is the typical NDP argument for why it ought not to be done.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I must now draw the attention of all hon. members to Standing Order 8(1). We're now dealing with motions other than government motions.

### Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathcona.

#### Underground Transmission Lines

504. Mr. Quest moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately investigate the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines to determine if they are a safe and viable option for transmitting high-voltage power.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to stand and open debate on Motion 504. The objective of this study is to provide information on the pros and cons of constructing and operating underground transmission lines. The study would also investigate the feasibility of constructing short-distance underground lines in residential and school zone areas.

5:00

Requiring portions of transmission lines to be placed underground is not without precedent, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 Maine passed An Act to Require Transmission Lines To Be Placed Underground near Certain Facilities. This act states that any portion of a transmission line capable of operating at 115 kV or more that is constructed, rebuilt, or relocated on or after October 1, 2009, must be placed underground if it's located adjacent to a residential area, a public playground, a private or public school, a child care facility, or a recreational camp.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Five hundred kV lines are a new technology to Alberta, and as with any new and large technical undertaking there needs to be consultation with Albertans. In order to consult effectively, all of the options and information need to be on the table. Doing a study on underground transmission is a necessary step to informing and consulting with Albertans. Some issues that need to be investigated are the technical characteristics of underground cable, including reliability; operation and maintenance factors; environmental impact; possible health issues; impact on communities; and cost.

I'd like to talk about cost as one of the most important reasons to do a feasibility study. Costs associated with construction of underground transmission lines are reportedly four to 20 times that of overhead lines. Mr. Speaker, there must be a better estimate of the cost of constructing underground transmission lines. I understand that many factors exist in determining the cost of any major project, and these factors fluctuate with markets in the economy, factors such as the current prices of material, construction, labour, and the development of better and more efficient technology. Determining the real costs in our current market would help verify if, indeed, underground transmission lines are feasible in specific

circumstances. These circumstances include close proximity to residential areas and schools.

The estimation of four to 20 times the cost of an above ground line is just not realistic for determining whether underground lines are an option in any circumstance. Let me also clarify that conducting a feasibility study on underground transmission lines does not mean looking at burying a line from border to border. It's to better understand the possibilities of underground transmission lines through variable distances and finding a cost comparison for short distances.

The Alberta Electric System Operator, AESO, published a report, Alberta's Industrial Heartland: Bulk Transmission Development, on May 30, 2008. It states that underground lines have the lowest agricultural, environmental, and visual impacts. Mr. Speaker, we need to know the details around these impacts as well as the costs to determine the viability of using underground transmission lines in the future. The Ministry of Energy released Launching Alberta's Energy Future: Provincial Energy Strategy at the end of 2008. It states: "Improvements will be sized to accommodate long-term growth and will use, where possible, technology such as high-voltage direct current to maximize efficiency of rights of way and minimize impacts."

A feasibility study will provide clarity on the advantages and disadvantages of using AC or HVDC transmission. For instance, we know that an advantage of HVDC transmission lines is that these lines are more efficient for transmitting energy over long distances, but very little is known about underground HVDC. A disadvantage of HVDC is the limited flexibility of the HVDC system. An HVDC transmission line cannot be segmented or tapped without construction of additional converter stations. Again, how is the cost impacted if more converter stations are required for certain distances of an underground line? The environmental impact of underground line transmission also needs to be determined. This would include the effects of additional converter stations.

Currently only two 500 kV lines are in operation in Alberta. One is in the south, connecting Calgary to British Columbia. The other is part of the south kV loop west of Edmonton. The need for more transmission capability has been established, and I think Albertans know that in order to continue to have the luxury of operating our homes and businesses with uninterrupted and reliable power, this province must move forward on plans to provide the means to supply much-needed power. But before we move ahead, exploring the options and possible opportunities of underground transmission is necessary, especially if underground transmission lines could be a viable alternative where the line affects residences or schools.

Therefore, I ask all hon. members here today to vote in favour of 504, and I look forward to listening to more of the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching this motion, Motion 504, with interest. I've been watching it on the Order Paper. I've certainly been following the issue of transmission lines, whether they're overhead or whether they're underground, and adjacent to the hon. Member for Strathcona's constituency is a significant local debate on how to proceed, where to proceed, and when to proceed with additional transmission lines. At some point in the near future these matters will be resolved, and we will have that route developed for the need, which will be the bitumen upgraders which hopefully will be located in the neighbourhood of the hon. Member for Strathcona.

I think this is a very important issue. How this will work is to be determined. It's certainly an issue that we should study. Other

jurisdictions have attempted underground transmission lines. It obviously already happens in neighbourhoods on a limited basis, but on volume and voltage I'm not sure how this would work. Certainly, underground transmission lines have several advantages. Obviously, there is the beautification of the neighbourhood, to bury the transmission lines rather than have them strung out on poles. A buried line certainly has less vulnerability to elements like ice and wind. In some areas like downtown it's much more practical than overhead lines, but underground lines, I'm told, cost more to install and maintain and result in increased electricity rates.

Now, I can be confident that the Minister of Energy doesn't want electricity rates in this province to go any higher. I know he's concerned about the folly that was electricity deregulation. Whether it's the price of power or the lack of generating capacity or the bottlenecks in the transmission system, we can go right back to electricity deregulation as the cause for these prices and shortages and a transmission system that is certainly not as reliable as it used to be.

We can also contemplate the bill that's eventually going to have to be paid by the consumers for the enhanced transmission system, or the improved transmission system. What that bill is is hard to say. I'm sure the minister knows, and I'm sure the minister knows how much that will be for a residential consumer on their monthly power bill, how much more they will have to pay. I'm sure he has all those answers.

I know that whenever transmission costs, Mr. Speaker, were shifted conveniently by a former Minister of Energy, with the approval of this cabinet, of course, to the bills of consumers, it was thought at that time that, well, maybe it'll be a \$2 billion additional bill for consumers to pay for the transmission debottlenecking that was needed. That bill went up to 3 and a half billion dollars. It went up to \$4 billion. It went up to \$5 billion. I would love to know what it is now, in April of 2009. If we were to upgrade our transmission system, bring it totally up to snuff, what would it cost, and how long would it take the consumers on a monthly basis to pay off those costs?

5:10

Certainly, we look at this idea of examining putting some of this transmission underground. I think it's noteworthy and it's worth while. We should at least check it out. I'm told that studies have shown that installing lines underground is expensive for consumers and taxpayers. I could be wrong, but I'm told it could cost as much as 10 times more than overhead distribution of transmission lines. I would certainly like clarification on this in the course of discussion on this Motion 504.

Underground lines are also much more difficult and expensive to work on when problems arise. Of course, we've got to dig them up, so there's earthmoving equipment and specialized technicians. We know that installing underground transmission lines is best done in an area as it's being developed. This is less expensive, of course, than converting later from overhead to underground. Overhead systems are easier, thus less expensive, to upgrade whenever a community grows or the industrial load for electricity grows and we require additional electricity capacity. So there are a number of issues that would certainly drive up the cost.

I thought at one point that the transportation and utility corridor adjacent to highway 216 would have been an appropriate place to install transmission lines as they're needed to power our industry. I don't know what will happen with that, but we'll see. I don't know if there's a stretch of property or an area where the hon. member has an idea where there could be a test facility set up to see how long it would take to install an underground transmission line, how much it would cost, how it would work.

Typically, I'm told, underground lines experience fewer outages,

but again whenever an outage happens, I would think it would last longer because the repairpersons will have a lot more difficult time locating the problem and then repairing it.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would urge the House to consider this motion. We need to have a look at this to see how underground transmission lines can work and if they will work and at what cost. We know that many communities, not only Sherwood Park but certainly through central Alberta, have reservations. They're very cautious about overhead transmission lines. I think this is an issue that the government has brought on itself by tolerating the use of spies on innocent citizens when they were exercising their democratic rights at a regulatory hearing regarding transmission lines and transmission systems.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge all hon. members of this Assembly to give this motion some thought and some consideration. There's no problem in investigating the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines. I think it's a matter of cost. It's not a matter of safety. It's not a matter of whether it will or will not work but of exactly what this would cost us. Certainly, regardless of where we live in this province and what we do to provide an income to ourselves and our families, we rely on electricity, and we have to recognize that we need a sound transmission system.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought for a moment there that it must be a different phase of the moon or something because for a split second I thought that the hon. member opposite and myself were going to completely agree on something. But I'm happy to report that, in fact, we're close.

I want to thank the MLA for Strathcona, Mr. Speaker, for bringing forward Motion 504 in the first place. I've said a number of times publicly around the province in the last couple of years that, you know, in my opinion, from the point of view of the Energy department, transmission is job one. We really feel that the transmission system requires upgrades. We know, in fact, that it requires upgrades.

There's a situation in the province where constraint is leading to inefficiency. Most certainly, a lot of line loss and heat losses in the system are costing Alberta consumers every day, so we know that we are going to move forward some additions and fortification to this system and, again, new power generation that's coming on in the province as we speak in a number of different areas across the province. Certainly, new generation, even some of our older, more conventional opportunities here with coal-fired generation, that sort of thing, have to have the highway opened up for them to get into the system and allow for Albertans to have the economical electrical utility that they require.

Just a couple of points, Mr. Speaker, with respect to what we're doing on the generating side before I touch on the thing about underground transmission. In southern Alberta there's a fairly major expansion of wind generation. I think, actually, that that will probably take place all up the eastern slopes in Alberta all the way into the northwestern corner of the province. In fact, there are opportunities all the way along that particular region.

The biomass industry: again, good opportunities for generating alternate electricity and green power.

Again, opportunities in the northwestern part of the province in the wood fibre business to diversify their industries a bit, good opportunities, we think, requiring some upgrades with respect to the transmission system.

Cogeneration in the Fort McMurray area: well understood.

Again, as I said, coal in central Alberta.

Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, major opportunities for hydro development across the province and run of the river. Different opportunities, I think, for some pumped hydro with storage.

Certainly, again, a major development in northern Alberta at Slave River relative to the issue of alternate and green power.

There are concerns around transmission, and we all understand that. We have had some opportunity to experience first-hand these concerns. We have as a government, I think, been responsive to landowners. We feel that landowners are the ones that are primarily impacted by grid development anyplace where you find this kind of development that's necessary in the white area or in areas where agriculture and landowners are in fact affected. They ask a lot of good questions, Mr. Speaker, relative to the ways that the government, industry, and themselves can lessen the impact of this particular fortification that we're going to require.

5:20

Most certainly, I would suggest that one of the things that comes to mind when you talk to landowners is the idea of underground lines: why can we not use more underground transmission? You know, you hear a number of stories about areas where they're using it where it does work. And it works. There isn't any doubt about it. I mean, we have one here from, I believe, kind of the west side of Edmonton into the core area of the city that was constructed last year, an AC underground system. HVDC light handles a lot more power, and it is in fact doable. I believe there are a couple of fairly major operations in Europe and one that we were made aware of and followed a bit that goes into Manhattan, in fact, underground and underwater and is working very well.

There are some issues. I actually agree with the member that I think, Mr. Speaker, generally, it's time that we investigate the issues of underground transmission. Of course, it has been mentioned already, but certainly cost is one. The access to an area to do it is another one, the safety relative to underground transmission. We need to understand that when you start into doing things like this, it needs to fit into the overall grid system that we have in the province. Not to suggest for a minute that it can't fit, but I think what we would find from this is how we make it fit.

You know, the idea of doing something like this is not to go out and see if we can't find people to tell us how we can't do it. I think the idea would be to go out again and do some research, do some work, and find out how we can do it. I think it's timely. I think that the debate is timely. I would have to tell you that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to encourage all members of the Legislature here to support this particular motion that the member has brought forward.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled today that our colleague from Strathcona has brought forward this motion. It's not only timely, but it's appropriate, as the Minister of Energy has noted, relative to getting the right kind of information. I think what prompted the MLA, the representative for Strathcona, was a significant amount of reaction from people that would be in proximity to that utility corridor.

For a number of years people have seen it as rather pristine landscape, but I want to remind this Assembly of something that occurred when the tornado came through, during a period when because of its very nature as a wide, green space it attracted one of the most traumatic events. During that period power lines were down, and an entire tank from the tank farm at the refineries was

relocated otop of a rail line. There was significant disruption along with that and, most tragically, 30 deaths of people in a trailer park.

Now, the peculiarity of this type of weather system moving through that area in itself was not something that you wouldn't expect to find where you have a wide open space, but what makes this area particularly unique is that there are literally millions of barrels of product that flow underground through that utility corridor to places as far away as Texas and New Jersey. This utility corridor, I would suggest, has a higher and better use as a continued area for utility right-of-way for the pipes underground, so it would be contiguous in the costing of this to look at whether or not an overground power line would in any way disrupt the capacity of that utility corridor to serve the underground pipelines that it currently serves. It proudly hosts the beginning of the longest pipeline in the world, so when we look at this, it's not only for the reasonableness of locating power underground. It's not just any corridor; it is the most important and significant corridor for Alberta in the conveyance of what is underground with the pipelines, several pipelines, several millions of barrels a day.

I think that there are a couple of ways to look at this. I'm not suggesting that here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly we write the terms of reference of such a costing but that we take a look at whether or not the placement of a power line otop or adjacent to this pipeline could in any way serve or render less useful the corridor for future pipeline expansion because of the kinds of things that ultimately might happen because of the development of the Industrial Heartland and some of the other options in the future.

Very recently people have come into my office to ask about the capacity for making cuts into our roads, into highway 14 for example, to go in following the pigging of one of the pipelines, do a direct cut to look at whether or not there's any corrosive action in the pipeline.

All of these things are issues that happen in this particular corridor, made wider around the city of Edmonton because of the utility right-of-way that it naturally has. So, as I say, I'm thrilled with the motion coming forward, the support of the Energy minister, because I can see a number of complexities here. If we located underground the power in the right-of-way, we would be less likely in the future to expose or leave vulnerable any of the kinds of things that could be left vulnerable if we continue to just assume that an overground power line is the most convenient and best way.

One final point, Mr. Speaker. At the time of that tornado Sherwood Park, a hamlet at the time, and the entire Strathcona county were rendered completely separated from the emergency facilities within the city of Edmonton, the health care facilities, the acute-care facilities, and it took some period of time to replace the power lines, roughly an hour in some parts of it. Although it was expedient, there was a period of time where life and limb might have been severely compromised because of the reduction of access because of the very nature of the transportation routings through that corridor.

It's an incredibly important corridor, and I think this costing must be done. I applaud the intent of the motion, and I urge all members to support it.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I would like to very briefly echo the support for Motion 504 as introduced by the hon. Member of the Legislative Assembly for Strathcona. Because I can't believe that anyone in this House would be opposed to exploring options and considering cumulative costs of putting power underground, I will

not take up a tremendous amount of time. I am extremely pleased that the government understands the importance.

A number of us here sat through the debate over Bill 46, and anyone who represents a rural area is well aware of the spy scandal that was brought up earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. In the debate over Bill 46 and the whole question of surface rights the government introduced 24 amendments to finally get the legislation to the point where a spoonful of sugar wasn't required to put the bad medicine down. Eventually, while it was universally rejected by members of the opposition, it did go forward. I would think that the hon. mover of Bill 19, who is himself a rural resident and has been a very active member of the AAMD and C, has personally experienced recently the type of anger and angst with regard to Bill 19, and he's seen the need to attempt to get it right and to produce amendments that deal with surface rights.

When we sort of do a cost analysis, what we have to take into account are court costs, costs of litigation, costs associated with land expropriation. We have to take into account the public good. I would like to think that part of the analysis of putting lines underground would be the consideration of public good in the form of reregulating electricity. Maybe that would be considered dreaming in technicolour in this House, but I think it would be a good time to re-examine the whole deregulation process and repair the damage that's been done.

5:30

In terms of the physics of converting AC to DC and back to AC again, it's done in Europe. There are precedents. In talking with representatives of ISEEE, the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, sometimes substituted for experiential learning, they have pointed out that in terms of the costs it is, in fact, more expensive than your traditional overhead lines. But as the hon. Minister of Energy pointed out, you have less line loss, so the conduction is of a more efficient nature, and as the hon. minister of finance pointed out, when power is lost, not only are lives potentially lost, but the quality of life is certainly compromised during emergency circumstances.

We have a beautiful province. We have very few parts of this province that don't have some type of human footprint crossing them. The idea of burying the transmission lines using the most current technology available, working with landowners as opposed to against them, to me would be a very successful strategy.

Other individuals have talked about the importance of green energy. Probably one of the largest unelected but vociferous supporters of green energy is Mr. Joe Anglin, who is the chair of the Green Party. [interjections] Yes. Now, it's interesting that there is such opposition to even the mentioning of that name, but it is interesting that the Green Party shares in terms of popular support about the same number as the Wildrose Alliance Party, which is, I would assume, in greater favour with representatives of this government.

Regardless, the idea of exploration of not only the cost but the efficiency of putting lines underground is worthy of all our support. I thank again the MLA for Strathcona for bringing it to our attention. It is progressive, and that is what theoretically the Progressive Conservative government is all about.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you. I want to thank the MLA for Strathcona for presenting this at this time. I think it's a very timely motion. You know, one of the issues that we deal with right now, especially in higher populated areas, is of course: not in my backyard. But maybe we can answer the issues of underground safety, aesthetics, maybe health issues, the EMF issue, electromagnetic

fields – that is always raised when lines are being put in – reliability, security, environmental, public opposition, et cetera. I mean, it's probably timely to have that debate.

I presently sit on a think tank of the Canadian Energy Research Institute that does a lot of independent work sometimes for government, sometimes for the oil patch. A group like this could probably easily do this type of work. At one time I chaired the transmission commission for the province, and I know that in some areas there are underground lines in North America. When I chaired the committee, it was probably back in 2003, 2004, and the ratio at that time was said to be about 9 to 1 underground versus overhead. Well, here we are in 2009, and they're talking about 4 to 1. Let's not kid ourselves. You know, no matter what we spend on transmission, we all pay as consumers. The consumers pay. But in some cases it may be more favourable to put in underground lines. I would say: not a chance that you could start putting high-voltage underground lines from one end of the province to the other, but there's no doubt for maybe some river crossings, some lake crossings. I know that from Vancouver to Vancouver Island there's not a power pole all the way across there, and on the surface of the ocean bottom floor there are power lines.

There's no doubt that it's time to have this discussion. With technology and maybe as a pilot project, maybe in an area where the MLA for Strathcona lives, that might be a good way to tell how this works. There are groups, like I talked about with the Canadian Energy Research Institute, that could take on this work. There's a lot of discussion out there within the power companies and the transmission companies themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be worthy of pursuing, and I would wholeheartedly support this motion. Thank you.

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise today and join debate on Motion 504. This motion, brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, proposes to urge the government to conduct a study on the feasibility of underground transmission lines.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has and will continue to experience large periods of growth, and as this province expands, our need for energy generation and distribution will grow accordingly. Transmission lines are the arteries of our power system, connecting power plants to the communities they serve. Therefore, I believe it is pertinent for any government to conduct studies exploring all possible avenues for power transmission, including underground transmission lines and AC/DC comparisons.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the bulk of power transmissions in this province are delivered by large overhead transmission lines that utilize AC transmission. Traditionally AC has been the preferred method for power transmission as it leaks less energy than DC, specifically over long distances. This technology has proven to be safe and reliable, but there are drawbacks. Most notably, overhead transmission lines are large and perceived to be unattractive by some. In turn, it is said that these unappealing structures could lower property values and pose a negative impact to our environment.

Mr. Speaker, because of these issues being raised, I feel that it is important to explore all power transmission systems, specifically short-distance underground lines, so as to answer the questions being raised by Albertans. Underground transmission lines would alleviate several of the concerns presented by overhead transmission.

There may be, however, other issues to consider. For example, the cost associated with installing underground lines may be



excessive, and we need to know what the costs may be. To date, to my knowledge, there has been no comprehensive study on the cost of underground line installation and maintenance, and I feel that a cost-benefit analysis is warranted. That is why I am very supportive of Motion 504. It seeks information on a topic that warrants further investigation. The future of power transmission in this province will require the utilization of several transmission technologies, and the first step towards implementing any technology is to study the benefits and drawbacks associated with it.

I would like once again to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing this forward, a very timely idea and a very timely issue. I, too, ask everyone to support Motion 504.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to congratulate and compliment the minister for – sorry. The Member for Strathcona. You never know. One day maybe.

There have been a couple of references, both from the Minister of Energy and, I think, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, talking about under water. Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that actually there have been underwater cables to Europe probably long before some of the members in this House were born, and they've been very successful, with great abilities to be able to maintain them. So there's nothing wrong with assuming that with the proper technical development this sort of thing could happen.

5:40

We have legislation coming forward for utility corridors, and I think it's very important that we spend some time. Up to this point I recall that the two and a half year if not longer process to get the Lethbridge-Montana tie-line through has cost that company a great deal of money in time and effort and certainly bad will amongst the people who were involved with this. If it had gone underground, I'm sure that it would have gone through quicker. The corridors are for that very reason, to have all of these trunks of either pipelines or electricity, gas, telephone, whatever, all in one place. They are easily accessible.

Back to the Montana tie-line. The company always said that it was too expensive, but I don't recall them ever actually having done these studies to say or to prove that, in fact, it was too expensive. Perhaps they should have been encouraged to stretch out their profit timeline because somewhere in there we also have to put in the cost of the public good.

I believe that this is one motion that also incorporates the chance to have perhaps that profit laid out but also the chance to really address the public good so that we all will benefit. There's no reason that companies that might be forced to use underground would be able to be unhappy when they really, really cost it out in terms of what it's going to cost them in bad will in the community.

Again, like everyone else who has spoken, I would encourage members in the House to support that. I really believe that we look today at what our grid systems look like and what we need in terms of electricity, but I don't think that we can even envision 10 years from now what it's really going to look like. Technology is moving at such a rapid rate, and attitudes are changing in terms of: we need the corridors, we need the electricity, so how can we all work together?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 504. This motion, brought forward

by the hon. Member for Strathcona, urges the government to conduct a feasibility study on the construction of underground power lines, specifically within short distances. I'd like to also comment that Motion 504 fits in very well with my forthcoming Motion 505 for the licensing of low-speed electric vehicles in urban areas.

The information gained through this study would help the government evaluate future electrical transmission projects across the province. Currently the majority of Alberta's high-voltage power lines are above ground, and this electrical transportation method has been used pretty much since the beginning of electricity in the province of Alberta. However, throughout the world underground power transmission lines are increasingly being used as the method of electrical transmission.

Indeed, on the family farm in Abbey, Saskatchewan, we've enjoyed underground electrical service for some 35 years now. [interjection] Yes, that would be in the province immediately to the east, hon. member. If you're moving a big auger around the yard or you're unloading a truck with a 20-foot grain box, you certainly appreciate the underground power line.

I think the concept of the underwater cables can best be highlighted by those of you who are movie buffs and the importance that they played in, of course, the movie *Jaws 2*. Alberta is unique in that we do not have any great white sharks; however, with our diverse landscape, what works in one part of the world may not in fact work here. This is why a study would be valuable. It would help to give us a better understanding of the possibilities of short-distance underground transmission lines in Alberta.

As we look at the past advancements in electrical transmission, we can see how important information has been in developing proper electrical transmission systems. The transformation from the DC, or the Edison current, to the alternating, or Tesla, current in power distribution in the late 19th century provides an example of how important it is to have studied the available power options. Indeed, this is a bit of a tribute that we owe to the unknown inventor and brilliant mind Nikola Tesla.

In technical terms the difference between DC and AC is in relation to the flow and the activity of the electrons as they flow through a current. In DC the electrons flow steadily in a single direction, where it's a continuous movement of electrons from an area of a negative charge to an area of a positive charge. DC is the power that is created and stored within batteries and in DC generators, with currents that go from a positive end to a negative end.

In the 19th century DC was the primary source of electrical distribution; however, the greatest challenge with the direct current method of electrical distribution in those days – and I'd emphasize “in those days” – was that the power plants could only send DC electrical currents about a mile before line losses became very significant. As a result Nikola Tesla created the alternating electrical current, which could carry electrical currents for hundreds of miles with very little loss of power. AC eventually became the dominant form of electrical distribution that we know today.

In an alternating current electrons repeatedly switch directions, which are called cycles, which makes it more suitable for long-distance transmission. In addition, the strength of the alternating electrical current can be increased or decreased quite simply through a mechanism called a transformer, converting it into what we refer to and what is affectionately known as 60 cycle, AC 220 volt electrical service, which you have coming into your house. This allows for high transmission voltages yet lower voltages to be sent into a house to adequately provide your power requirements. Another advantage of AC is that it can be converted to DC through a very simple adapter similar to the ones, for example, that are powering our laptop computers today.

The evolution of electrical distribution has led to more efficient

and effective distribution of power across North America and much of the world. Constructing underground short-distance power lines may continue this evolutionary process and improve the distribution of power within this province. To this end, studying the feasibility of underground power transmission would help identify the benefits and drawbacks of underground electrical transmission lines. Along with an increasing population and industrial base and as an increasing energy provider, it is essential that Albertans understand the best decision that they can make to address their energy needs.

I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this motion, and I encourage all hon. members on both sides of this House to vote in favour of Motion 504. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure as well to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 504. This motion was brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and it is to urge the government to conduct a feasibility study on the construction of underground power transmission lines. I strongly support this motion because of the potential benefits that underground transmission has for local communities.

Overhead transmission lines are large, sometimes unsightly, and have the potential to reduce property values. In addition to potentially reducing property values, overhead transmission lines may generate concerns about safety, especially if they come down in populated areas. For example, I'll just mention a couple here. In 1998 Quebec suffered from severe ice storms that damaged or destroyed over 1,300 overhead transmission lines and caused over 1 million households to lose power, some for longer than a month. Mr. Speaker, the negative economic impact of that storm was estimated at over a billion dollars, and in order to deal with this state of emergency, over 16,000 members of the Canadian Forces were called in to assist the people.

Even in Alberta severe weather or natural disasters may damage overhead lines and pose a risk to local residents, especially in high-density residential areas. Community members have recognized these concerns and have brought them forward during the consultation processes for this motion. Through consultation with residents we feel as though underground transmission might be a way to effectively address the needs of some communities while continuing to provide the power transfer infrastructure that Alberta needs to continue to prosper. After all, underground transmission has proven to be an effective technology in other areas of the world; however, little is known specifically about short-distance underground transmission in Alberta.

5:50

One example of the successful use of underground transmission can be found in Australia, specifically near the city of Perth. In 1994 Perth was hit with severe windstorms that damaged or destroyed many of their transmission facilities. Since that time over 32 major underground power transmission projects have been undertaken, and several more are slated for completion between now and next year.

Another example highlighting the viability of underground transmission would be the Tokyo long-distance line. The Shin-Toyosu line is the longest underground transmission line in the world and connects central Tokyo with its outlying transmission grid. In addition, this line operates at 500 kilovolts, is 39.8 kilometres long, and has been in operation since 2000.

Mr. Speaker, these two examples demonstrate that underground transmission is a viable technology. Furthermore, through cooperation with these jurisdictions Alberta could gain significant information and technical knowledge on how best to utilize underground transmission in this province.

Mr. Speaker, on my own farm I have installed a lot of underground power lines, although they're low voltage, 220 volts. I put in all underground throughout the yards for various reasons. The costs have been increased, but I'm willing to pay these increased costs because I believe that the advantages outweigh the costs. It's for safety and reliability.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, what Motion 504 aims to determine is whether or not underground transmission is a viable technology for Alberta. Alberta has a unique environment and climate conditions that need to be understood in the context of underground transmission. Furthermore, a study needs to be conducted on the environmental impact of underground lines as well as the costs associated with installing and maintaining underground infrastructure.

I feel as though underground technology could address the concerns voiced to us by our local communities and that it is our responsibility as members of this House to explore the feasibility of this emerging technology. I would like to thank the hon. member for his well-thought-out and timely idea, and I would encourage all members to join with me in support of Motion 504.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to participate in the discussion on Motion 504 brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, which urges the Alberta government to closely examine the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines. We do need to take a good look at the costs, benefits, and technical feasibility of underground transmission lines. While there may be hurdles to overcome, we know for a fact that underground transmission lines are operating in other parts of the world: Tokyo, Australia, and the U.S., for example. It's clear, then, that there's a potential for underground transmission. In order to assess the overall feasibility of underground transmission, we need an accurate assessment of the fully burdened costs, not just the capital costs but any differences in operating and maintenance costs as well.

Currently Alberta faces several challenges with respect to transmission, and underground transmission lines could be a viable solution to some of these issues. Mr. Speaker, it's clear that we need to expand our province's transmission system; however, it's been a lengthy, costly, drawn-out process in great part because of NIMBY, not in my backyard, Albertans not wanting the overhead lines in their neighbourhoods. Fair enough. Additionally, there are concerns regarding overhead transmission lines and their impact on the health of people living nearby, effect on property values, and aesthetics. Underground transmission lines have the potential to eliminate most of these concerns.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, for 30 years we've set aside lands for transportation utility corridors, yet now we find ourselves disagreeing on if that dedicated land will actually be used for the purpose it was dedicated for. We hear about cost concerns, how it may be four times, seven and a half times, 10 times more expensive to build transmission lines underground than above ground. I wonder if this considers the fact that, one, we've already paid for our transmission utility corridor, some of which is not being used. What is the cost of just sitting on that land or forcing Albertans to pay for additional land to site lines? The delays, missed opportunities, and cost escalations that current opposition to line siting causes Albertans: what does that cost? The cost to regular Albertans: how do overhead lines affect property values and aesthetics?

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Standing Order 8(3) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of

the motion to close the debate. I would like to call on the hon. Member for Strathcona to close the debate.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I won't need the whole five minutes. I'd just like to thank all of the hon. members for their comments and their support. I'd ask that all members present here today support Motion 504.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I'd move that we say it's 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]



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