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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.

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us in all of our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some great guests joining us today from Sainte Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic school in Innisfail. We have 22 grade 6 students, and accompanying them are two teachers, Miss Jessica Major and Miss Kelsi da Costa, and two parent-teacher helpers, Mrs. Sue Haddow and Mrs. Phyllis Towle. I'm pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton today and view the proceedings. I had a picture taken with them a little earlier. They were very, very good at answering questions, and I'm sure they'll be great leaders some day. I would like them to rise – I don't see them in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. Edmonton-Manning first, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome students from the York academic elementary school from my riding of Edmonton-Manning. These 55 bright and young grade 6 students along with parent helpers and their teachers, Miss Strasdin and Mrs. Schenk, have toured our Legislature and learned a lot about our building and the provincial government. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Sorry about that, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I was momentarily mesmerized by the comment from the Minister of Transportation about the ability to answer questions.

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 this Legislative Assembly government employees from the Employment and Immigration division. This dedicated team works to make sound immigration policies and programs to attract people with the right skills at the right time. Their work also helps to assess educational qualifications so that newcomers have the best options to make a successful start to their careers. Well-settled and well-integrated newcomers form a solid foundation to a strong and enriched Alberta. It is my privilege to welcome this brilliant team of professionals, who work to make our province the best place to live and raise a family. I would ask my guests to rise so that we can give them a very warm welcome to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a couple of gentlemen that I had lunch with today. Mr. Randy Kerr and – I can't see him – Mr. Ken Lueers, senior vice-president of western Conoco-Phillips, had a chance to meet the Minister of Advanced Education and our President of the Treasury Board today. They were there to explain some of the goings-on in our riding and across the province of their operations in southern Alberta and other points. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present to you and through you to all members of this Assembly directors of the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta. They should all be in the members' gallery. Directors, again, of the Parkinson Society, please stand: Myles Rusak, Ernie Yaskowich, Doug Darling, Bruce Strachan, and Bob Head. We are also joined by clients and supporters of the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta: Dave and Diane Scott, David Morris, Laurine Fillo, Beverly Head, Sarah Rusak. Dr. Wayne Martin and Marguerite Wieler are here from the movement disorders clinic in Calgary. We are also joined by Ray Williams, the CEO of The Parkinson's Society of Alberta, who is accompanied by director Sandy Brodie and client Ken Rowes. I would like you to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very good, long-time friend and business acquaintance of mine, Mr. Salim Shajani. Salim and I have had an acquaintance and friendship getting on for three decades, just a very productive family for the province of Alberta and, certainly, Canada as well. Salim is in the members' gallery. I would ask him to rise, please, and ask my colleagues here to give him the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to members of this Assembly four people from CAANA, the Commuter Air Access Network of Alberta. I'd like to introduce Mr. Paul Gervais, Mr. John Szumlas, Ms Mary Anne Stanway, and Mr. Ralph Henderson. It may be of interest to you to note that Mr. Henderson was one of the key people in my decision to run for the Conservatives in the Edmonton-Calder constituency.

CAANA believes in an open-skies policy for Alberta and seeks to link all aspects of air travel in Alberta together. I will be discussing more about this organization in my member's statement later on this afternoon. I would ask all four members to rise to please receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Edmonton City Centre Airport

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. CAANA, the Commuter Air Access Network, the group that I introduced earlier, is an association of communities, businesses, and people committed to improving air access among all regions of Alberta. By way of the Edmonton City Centre Airport CAANA seeks to improve air access to our capital city and create an open-skies policy for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Calder is a major hub for infrastructure in Alberta, and the City Centre Airport is a major part of this. It is not just a major factor for Edmonton but for the province as a whole. By focusing on the needs of the users and providers of air service, CAANA seeks to promote the development and operation of scheduled commuter air passenger service. This could help to strengthen the connections between businesses, agencies, government, and Albertans.

CAANA is one of the many organizations in my constituency that have a vested interest in the airport debate. Airco is one of these organizations affected as well as they operate out of the City Centre Airport. Over the next few weeks I will be introducing many groups, like CAANA, Airco, and the Kingsway Business Association, from Edmonton-Calder who raise issues regarding the status of the airport in particular and air travel in general.

I have seen a lot of noise generated over this debate over the last year, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans have been debating this particular issue for the last 52 years. While I cannot propose a solution to this lengthy debate, we need to keep ourselves informed about issues like this because they affect all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

1:40 Parkinson's Awareness Month

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to thank the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta for giving tulips to the hon. members of this Assembly. As Parkinson's official flower, the tulip reminds us of the importance of research. Much has been accomplished in this field, but a cure has yet to be found.

Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, and I urge all Albertans to do what they can to help raise awareness about this disease and to make much-needed donations. Parkinson's is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease. The loss of dopamine in the brain affects both motor and nonmotor functioning. While Parkinson's has tremendous effects on the body, it leaves the mind perfectly untouched. Approximately 100,000 Canadians live with this debilitating disease. They are affected by tremors, slowness, balance issues, and muscle rigidity. The average age of diagnosis with Parkinson's is 60 years, but it can affect people as young as 30 or 40.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Parkinson's societies of southern and northern Alberta and what they do for individuals and families who live with Parkinson's. Supported by volunteers, donations, and dedicated staff, they provide counselling, support groups for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers, learning resources, referrals, peer programs, in-service community awareness programs, and speech therapy. Parkinson's is not easy to live with, but nonprofit organizations make a world of difference for many affected Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Families Learning Together

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform the House of the good work being done by Families Learning Together, a project designed by the Taber and District Community Adult Learning Association. The 17-week, full-time program is funded through Employment and Immigration, Advanced Education, and an anonymous donor, and has provided English as a second language, literacy, and workplace preparation skills to low-income, non-English speaking families since 1999. Whenever possible, the program is held in schools within the Horizon school division.

Although the program is open to all immigrants, the learners are predominantly low German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico with Canadian citizenship. As a rule, they have no formal education past the age of 12 and no literacy skills in their first language. Mr. Speaker, FLT is unique because it involves both parents and their preschool children to strengthen and build basic skills of the parents while supporting parental involvement in their children's learning.

Being that the participants work in agriculture and are seasonally employed, the program was designed to accommodate this and is offered from November to March each year. On March 26, 2009, I attended a celebration of learning event with the parliamentary assistant of Advanced Education and Technology in Taber, where we had the privilege of listening to eight adult learners talk about the value of the program for them and their families. One student has been accepted into an upgrading program at Lethbridge College and plans to be an accountant. Another student, a mother of six, is now getting her class 1 driver's licence to assist during harvest. Another spoke of how his improved English now enables him to do his own banking, attend medical appointments, read to his child, and be a better employee. One might well say that Families Learning Together embodies Alberta's new slogan: Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join with me in congratulating these people in Taber for the good work they do.

Calgary Peace Prize

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on March 30 I attended the third annual Calgary peace prize gala dinner in Calgary. The Calgary peace prize is an award established by the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary to highlight Calgary's contribution to world peace. The prize recognizes outstanding individuals from the global community for their work toward peace, social justice, and human security.

Some of the past recipients include His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba of Hiroshima, who was the founder of Mayors for Peace.

I was delighted that the 2009 peace prize recipient was Ms Louise Arbour, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights between 2004 and 2008. Her past work includes being appointed to the Supreme Court and Ontario Court of Appeal, the Supreme Court of Canada, as well as by the Security Council of the United Nations as chief prosecutor for the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. It is wonderful to see the Consortium for Peace Studies recognize individuals whose work has made the world a safer and less violent place.

Also taking part in this great event was Dr. Bill Phipps, a former moderator of the United Church of Canada; Mr. Blair Mason, chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; the Leader of the Official Opposition of Alberta; and Janet Keeping, president of the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank Mr. George Melnyk and Maureen Wilson, the co-chairs for the Consortium for Peace Studies, and their amazing group for putting on a great event for a good cause.

Thank you.

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

World Health Day

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge World Health Day, which was yesterday, April 7. This year the World Health Organization's World Health Day focused on hospital safety and patient care during times of crisis.

As you know, no region in the world is immune to the threat of disaster, and Alberta is no exception, whether through tornado, flood, or pandemic influenza. I am proud to say that our exceptional health facilities and centres and our professional staff and workers are the cornerstones of a health care system that is one of the strongest in the country.

But it takes more than a strong building to ensure the safety of care during a catastrophe. Investments in health care infrastructure and fortifying the effectiveness of existing facilities are vital in positioning health care services where and when they are urgently needed. But keep in mind that capital investment has to be done wisely. Take Vision 2020 and the continuing care strategy, for example, which highlight this government's commitment to initiatives such as providing more health care in community settings and freeing up hospital beds for those in dire need. It also aims to further increase Alberta's health workforce to meet the growing demand for services.

I encourage all Albertans to thank those who are dedicated to patient care when disaster strikes. They are like angels among us when we need them the most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Wildlife Week

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Canada's National Wildlife Week. This week is celebrated every year beginning on April 10 in honour of the late Jack Miner and his pioneer work in wildlife conservation. This year's campaign, Our Home and Native Plants, encourages Canadians to conserve and protect our natural habitats.

The National Wildlife Week celebrations across the country are showcasing native vegetation and the value of native plants. Mr. Speaker, from the fescue grass in southern Alberta to the lodgepole pine in our boreal forest, plants are an essential component of our biodiversity. Native plants and trees provide homes for many species of Alberta wildlife, keeping them safe as they nest, sleep, and feed.

The western blue flag iris has been adopted by the Alberta Native Plant Council as a symbol of Alberta's rare and native plants. This flower can only reproduce in the most favourable conditions, and it needs the help of pollinators such as bees to do so.

Recently this Assembly debated the adoption of the red cap mushroom as the official fungi emblem of Alberta. Mushrooms serve an important role in our ecosystems by decomposing organic matter. They also provide many benefits to plants that grow around them that, in turn, provide sustenance for all wildlife. During National Wildlife Week we should also remember Alberta's fungi.

Mr. Speaker, with the snow disappearing and our province turning green, many Albertans will be enjoying the outdoors this long

weekend. I'd like to remind all Albertans to take the time to learn more about the trees, shrubs, and other plants native to our province and the essential role they play in maintaining Alberta's wildlife and biodiversity. Plenty of information is available on the websites of Sustainable Resource Development and Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of 2002 By-election

The Speaker: Hon. members, on April 8, 2002, there was a by-election held in the province of Alberta, and a new member arrived in this Assembly. Congratulations to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. When he arrived here seven years ago, he had peach fuzz on his face. Now he is a mid-range, grizzled veteran on his seventh anniversary.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Fiscal Responsibility

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This budget gives all the proof needed of years of fiscal mismanagement and that this administration fundamentally must change, yet nothing, absolutely nothing in this budget shows Albertans that this administration has learned what it needs to and will stick to a budget, a plan, and discipline itself in its spending. Instead this budget anticipates prompt return to the bounty of the past 12 years and a plan on a wish and a prayer to get back to business as usual. To the Premier: with consistent large budget increases year over year and overspending will your government take action now to put Alberta on a course for fiscal discipline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the money that we invested in people programs over the past number of years reflected the growing population. It also reflected the tremendous need to keep up with our infrastructure because as people moved to Alberta, they didn't bring their schools or hospitals nor did they bring the nurses and the doctors with them. So we had to encourage more people and spend more money on those services. When we held consultations across this province across a very wide group of sectors, people said: try to build your budget based on the rate of inflation plus population growth. That's what we did. It's around 3.7 per cent.

Dr. Swann: A glaring example of this government's inability to change is its continued support for the faltering racehorse industry as well as millions of dollars to the highest paid deputy ministers and senior officials in this province. In a time of record-breaking deficits, Mr. Premier: why?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the one item that the hon. leader said, in terms of highest paid deputies: that simply is not true. We're in the middle range of other provinces, but we do not have the highest paid deputies.

Yes, we've got a lot of work to do. There's another confusion by the members across that we have to find \$2 billion this year. The \$2 billion that we're talking about is the next year out. Again, the most comprehensive three-year business plan of any jurisdiction in Canada: we actually roll out the three-year business plan with our budget. We're going to work with all Albertans this year to find the savings for next year's budget.

Dr. Swann: On behalf of all Albertans will the Premier establish an independent value-for-money audit and restore the trust of Albertans in their wealth management and that they're getting the best value for their tax dollars?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of organizations that see that as the government we give them value for their dollar. One of them is the Auditor General. The other is the business sector out there. Various business schools give us advice quite regularly, in fact. I believe we have the trust. In fact, I would say that given the kind of responses we've received over the last number of hours after the budget was delivered yesterday, we are on the right track. Albertans support the balance between supporting those most vulnerable yet not having to bring about any drastic tax increases or at the same time not looking at any drastic cuts to programs.

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

Health Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While transparency in public finance is fundamental to public trust, instead of being transparent about the true deficit our province is facing, this government has chosen not to report on the true state of our staggering deficit. To the Premier: given the massive deficit predicted in the health transition, why were the health regions' deficits not reported in this budget?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, the minister can answer as to when the services board will be delivering their report to him. But here's another thing. You know, I was watching some of the coverage, and some of the reporters kept referring to the deficit, that the deficit we're going to be incurring, the \$4.7 billion, is like the deficit in 1986. Well, quite frankly, the budget in 1986 was \$13.6 billion with a deficit of over \$4 billion. That was close to 30 per cent of the total expenses. If we were going to go year to year in terms of inflation, with a \$4 billion deficit in 1986 the kind of deficit budget we delivered would actually be \$2.1 billion in 1986.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. To the health minister, then: what is the total deficit for the health regions?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to supply that information when we receive the audited financial statements of the Alberta Health Services Board by the 30th of June.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the deficits are there, how does the government plan to address the deficits? Where will the money come from?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is incorrect. For the last actual deficit that was incurred in the health regions, we passed a special order of Treasury Board to clear those deficits off. I think it was last summer. As is required by law, the Alberta Health Services Board will file an audited financial statement for the year ending March 31, 2009.

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

Employment Supports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this year's budget we unfortunately do not see any significant additional support going to laid-off workers. With tens of thousands of Albertans losing their jobs in recent months, this should be a key priority for the government, but it isn't. While the government claims it's spending millions of dollars on employment and training programs, the reality is that there is only a 2.2 per cent increase from last year. To the Premier: at a time when Alberta's unemployment rate is spiking, how can this government claim to be supporting Albertans who have lost their jobs when it is basically running the same programs as it did last year with no significant increase in funding to support laid-off workers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our budget is based on growing jobs, not taking jobs away. That's the big difference in the philosophy, I guess, of those sitting across the way. For every billion dollars invested in public infrastructure, it's 11,600 jobs. So for the \$7.2 billion that we're investing in infrastructure, that's over 80,000 jobs created just on infrastructure alone.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, this government's bitumen upgrading policy has cost thousands of good jobs in this province, and the Premier knows that. In the budget we see \$7 million budgeted for labour attraction, the same as last year. How can the Premier justify a policy that spends taxpayers' dollars to recruit additional temporary foreign workers when tens of thousands of Albertans here in this province have been laid off in the first two months of the year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you also find out from employers that we are short in a number of skill sets. There are employers that still have signs saying, you know: we need people in these various skill sets. We're open to bringing people in from other jurisdictions to fill those job vacancies. To those Albertans that are currently unemployed, we also have money in the budget to retrain them for those jobs that are vacant there and to give them those skills so that they can fill those vacancies.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Thirty thousand Albertans lost their jobs in January and February alone, with March's numbers still to come, and the government is now projecting 6.5 per cent unemployment for the coming year, yet the government is cutting support for career development services and basic skills and academic upgrading. How can the Premier explain this policy to Albertans who are trying to get back to work? You're not supporting them. You don't care.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, other than just the rhetoric coming from the opposition and looking at little bits and pieces, the overall Budget 2009 clearly addresses the priorities of Albertans. We're hearing that from Albertans very clearly. As I said, we're looking after the most vulnerable. Seniors: an 11 per cent increase. We've seen an increase in AISH, a substantial increase. We're seeing an increase to child care. We're seeing an increase in Health at a time when it's difficult to find all the dollars. At the same time all those in need are going to be taken care of in this province.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the finance minister tabled a budget that was not only late; it was

incomplete. The unspecified cuts of a quarter billion dollars this year and \$2 billion next year in this half-baked budget will create fear and uncertainty among Albertans. The government has left the sword of unemployment hanging over the heads of thousands and left Albertans to fear the reduction or elimination of programs they and their families depend on. My question is to the Premier. Why didn't you finish your budget so that Albertans would at least know where they stand?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Albertans know where they stand. This government cares about every Albertan: those that are working, those that might have lost their job, those that are sick, those that are seeking help. You know, even the families that are caught in difficult situations: we have programs even in these difficult economic times to look after them. With respect to the \$2 billion at least the hon. member knows that, yes, we're going to have a very serious discussion about next year, not this coming year '09-10 but '10-11, in terms of finding a further \$2 billion. But I know where we can start. We can start by asking the federal government to treat us equally, equal to every other person in this country, and reimburse us at least \$700 million for the cuts to health transfer to Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this budget is so lame that if it was a horse, they'd have to take it out and shoot it. Not only are there no new jobs; there are cuts to municipal infrastructure and to the environment, and another 2 and a quarter billion dollars worth of cuts to come. Will the Premier stand in this House and tell Albertans exactly what cuts he has in mind, and if he can't do that, will he explain to the people who elected him the reason why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, watching the mayor from the city of Edmonton yesterday, he made a very wise observation. He says that, yes, we do have about \$20 million less coming to the city overall. But on the other hand, he also said that given these times we will save more than the \$20 million in the infrastructure we have to do; these are tough economic times. That to me shows that the mayor is a good businessperson. We're good business people. We're going to work through this together.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there is no excuse for an incomplete budget. None. When my son, a university student, struggles to meet a deadline for a term paper, he knows what he has to do.

The question is to the Premier. When you realized that the budget wasn't finished, why didn't you and your finance minister down a couple of Red Bulls, pull an all-nighter, and get 'er done?

Mr. Stelmach: Did he say "pull a red bull" or "down a Red Bull"? Okay. Sorry. He has got me baffled as to what he's talking about. [interjection] It's a good thing the microphone never picked that up.

The issue here is – and it is a serious issue – that we're going to work with all Albertans over the next number of months. As I said before, \$700 million on the table. I'm sure there'll be other questions coming forward during this question period. Our President of the Treasury Board also has other ideas that he's going to share with Albertans because we're going to reach out to Albertans. As Albertans, as a government we're working together. That's the strength that got us into this good financial position, and we're going to continue to work with those same Albertans.

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

Seniors' Benefits

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I've heard from many of my seniors who are worried about making ends meet. In these tough economic times how is the government helping those who are most in need and, in particular, those seniors on fixed incomes who really need a helping hand?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that this government is committed to assisting low-income seniors who are most in need, and yesterday's budget was proof of that. I hope the leader of the third party is listening because Alberta's low-income seniors who are most in need will now receive even more assistance. I'm very happy to tell you that the maximum monthly benefits for low-income seniors is increasing by \$40 per month to \$280 per month, and for senior couples it's increasing by \$60 a month to \$420 per month.

Mr. McQueen: Thank you for that. That's wonderful news that the benefits are increasing, but that is just one half of the equation. The other half is eligibility for the benefits, especially the income thresholds that decide if a senior will qualify for assistance. Has the government made any progress on income eligibility?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to add that those benefits that have increased will start as of April 1 of this year, so seniors will see that on their April cheque.

Mr. Speaker, we've also increased the maximum benefit and the qualifying thresholds for low-income seniors most in need. Beginning in July, which is the beginning of our benefit year, we'll have increased thresholds. For single seniors the threshold will increase by \$1,300 to \$24,000. For senior couples it increases by \$2,100 to \$39,000. As a result of these threshold increases we'll have another 6,000 seniors who will qualify for Alberta's seniors' benefit, for a total of 144,000 seniors that receive these benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question also to the same minister. Many seniors also need access to affordable, supportive housing. Will this need be addressed, especially as Alberta's population continues to age, and will it be addressed in both the urban and the rural areas of Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I announced \$119 million for the affordable supportive living initiative that was both for rural and urban areas and lodge modernization, and this budget gives us another \$50 million for more supportive living initiatives. This will help the supply of affordable housing for our seniors, with 450 new units coming on with that \$50 million. With this funding the province has now invested \$415 million in capital funding grants since 1999 to support the development and modernization of 8,000 affordable supportive living units for seniors.

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

Environmental Monitoring and Evaluation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite failing to catch oil and grease leaking into the Athabasca River and for almost five years failing to catch a major oil sands company's negligence in installing air pollution scrubbers, among other examples, the

Department of Environment has now cut its monitoring budget by 23 per cent. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Giving the growing evidence that this department has failed in the past to enforce its own regulations, why did this government slash its monitoring and evaluation budget by 23 per cent?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the preamble first. The fact of the matter is that the government did not miss dealing with these issues. The only reason this member can refer to them is because we laid charges and the guilty parties pled in court.

Mr. Speaker, we'll go into great detail in committee when we get into the budget. The short answer for this member is that there was no cut in the budget as it relates to compliance. There was some one-time funding that was in last year's budget that was invested in research. That was known as being a one-time investment. The core funding remains entirely intact, and I look forward to discussing it in committee.

Ms Blakeman: No. Vote 2.0.1 has been reduced.

Again to the same minister: considering that the largest percentage increase, 70 per cent, in this department was to the communications budget, can the minister explain why the government keeps opting for a communications strategy over action on environmental protection?

Mr. Renner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of detailed questions that are very difficult to deal with in question period. With respect to the line item in the communications budget, again, it is a realignment of staff within the department that have been brought from a number of different areas. For example, we've brought our internal communications people that were separated throughout the department together in one office. Again, there is no increase in this budget. It's a realignment and a consolidation of existing resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given the amount of lip service that this minister pays to fighting global warming, it's curious that the Department of Environment only spent a tiny fraction of the money that it set aside last year for climate change, so can the minister please explain which programs were not implemented in '08-09?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the main program is the one that we'll be having much discussion on tomorrow, and that is the consumer rebate program that was mentioned in the budget speech yesterday. We've issued a media advisory that we'll be discussing it in much more detail tomorrow.

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

2:10

Wild Rose Foundation

Mr. Allred: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In the budget yesterday it was revealed that funding for grants through the Wild Rose Foundation was not part of this year's budget. My questions are for the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why did you make these changes to this very important program?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, over the last year we've reviewed many different aspects in our department, and one of those was our

community investment programs. What we want to ensure is that we're giving the best possible level of service to our 19,000 not-for-profit sector members throughout the province. We decided that we would streamline the community initiatives program and the Wild Rose program because they have similar criteria, similar groups, and we want to be more efficient. We are going to maintain the excellent parts of the Wild Rose such as the board development program. We're going to maintain Vitalize. We're going to keep those employees in our department. We are going to use some of those people on our Wild Rose board to help us with the Alberta not-for-profits voluntary sector initiative, which is housed in our department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is again to the same minister. What consultations did you have before making this decision?

Mr. Blackett: Well, other than the 35 years of experience I've had in various capacities in not-for-profit sectors, I've been in over 50 communities in the province. I've talked to CCVO, Volunteer Alberta, and ECVO. Even though I didn't specifically talk about Wild Rose funding, they did come back and say that there's too much duplication; there's too much red tape, too much paperwork. We're going to streamline that process. We want to do as the Leader of the Opposition said: get disciplined in our spending and provide better value for our taxpayers' dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly rewarding to hear that we're cutting red tape.

My last question is again to the same minister. Why would you make these funding cuts to the nonprofit sector in these troubling economic times when people rely on these services?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we're realigning our budget, making our programs effective, efficient, and transparent. We have \$164.2 million out of my department alone that goes to the not-for-profit sector. That's not including the \$80 million that comes out of the community spirit tax credit. As I said earlier, we need to make investment programs more effective; we need to make them more efficient. This sector is of a tremendous value to all Albertans, and I would encourage everyone to give to them, to encourage them, and to tell the story about the great things they do on behalf of three and a half million Albertans.

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

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the mysteries of this budget is found on the bottom of page 102 of the ministry business plans. For the past several years the government has had a target of obtaining 20 to 25 per cent of the value of Alberta's petroleum production through royalties. It was a modest target that the government seldom met, but it was a target. This year the target has been dropped. There is no target for royalty collection. My question is to the Minister of Energy: why this enormous step backwards in accountability and management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is, I believe, that for a number of years members across the way have criticized the government and criticized our department relative to the projections that we make on resource revenue. There aren't any people in this Assembly that I know of, none that I know of in the investment community, and very, very, few, if you could find any, in the industry that would have properly predicted oil to be at \$147 and \$38 in the same nine-month period.

Dr. Taft: Missed the point completely. I draw the minister's attention to page 102 of his ministry business plan, the bottom lines. The bottom line is that this government used to have a target of collecting 20 to 25 per cent of petroleum production through the royalty system. They had that target for years. The target is gone. There simply isn't one. In this first year of the new royalty framework it's vital that Albertans know if that royalty framework is working. So again to the minister: how will the government, industry, this Legislature, or the people of Alberta know if the new royalty framework is working when there is neither a goal nor a measure by which to judge it?

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, there certainly are goals, and there are targets. I can tell you that it's a fool's errand for us to go out and try to predict what may or may not happen in the next fiscal framework that we're dealing with here. We realize that we're going to be in a situation where the low commodity prices that we're seeing today very obviously will change. It's, again, interesting that over the last three or four months the price of natural gas was anywhere in kind of the \$6 range; today I think it's trading for about \$3.30. What kind of a target would people like us to set relative to that?

Dr. Taft: Okay. We're not communicating here. We've got a problem in our communication. Page 102 of the business plans: check it out. The target we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is collecting a percentage, whether oil prices are a hundred dollars or \$40. What per cent are we hoping to collect as a target through the royalty system? Has the minister given up on any measure, any target at all on a percentage for the royalty framework to collect? If so, how will we ever know if it works?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest that if you wanted to look at the numbers and how the new royalty framework might compare with a royalty framework that was, you know, in the province previously, maybe in 1938 or '42 or '60 or '90, whatever period you want to choose, you could say, "If we look back, we collected 20 per cent at this point and 40 per cent at this point, then some other percentage," but it's redundant information. What we will do is manage these resources in the best interests of Albertans.

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

Education Property Tax

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping that my question isn't as catastrophic as my member's statement. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As announced in

yesterday's budget, the province's education property tax requisition is increasing. I would like the Minister of Municipal Affairs to explain what those increases are.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, education is an investment in our future. The province provides the majority of funding for education. In fact, we invest over \$6.3 billion into education, and we collect \$1.7 billion through the education tax. This year the increase is \$85 million, which represents 5.2 per cent. I need to emphasize that that is real growth in the province. We are committed to providing a quality, accessible – and I need to stress accessible – education system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former school board trustee more funding for education is certainly very welcome.

My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister explain how these taxes will impact the citizens of Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, all of the taxes that are collected are invested back into the education system to help educate our students to become doctors and policemen and teachers. When we talk about Calgary, \$580 million will be collected through taxation, but we invest \$1.24 billion back into Calgary. The increase will represent approximately \$3.50 per household per month. We are going to continue to support a world-class system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental is to the same minister. Is the government planning to phase out the education portion of the property taxes?

2:20

Mr. Danyluk: No. No, Mr. Speaker, we are not. We believe that the current system finds a balance. It provides a stable source of revenue and ensures equitable funding for students no matter where they live. This government provides the majority, as I said before, of our basic education funding. It is a good system. We need to be proud that it is one of the best in the world.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What Alberta's seniors need are long-term care beds now, not replacement beds by 2015. It's well known that it costs taxpayers far more money to keep seniors in acute-care beds, where, I must admit, the care isn't quite as good because the staff are not trained in the same way, while they wait for placement in long-term care when compared to the cost of the long-term care bed. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are additional long-term care beds not the priority in this year's budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the opposition can try as hard as they want to find what's not in the budget, but I want to talk about what is in the Health budget. What we have in the Health budget is some 7.7 per cent increase to Alberta Health Services to deliver services across the province. We have an additional \$42 million in this budget to deliver home care for those most vulnerable in our society, especially seniors. We've also increased, as an example,

our cancer drugs by some 20 per cent. We've put in extra money for safe communities. We've got to talk about this budget being a good news Health budget in tough economic times.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there were some very good things in the budget, and I would thank the seniors minister for a lot of that.

Has the minister done a value-for-money audit on how much it costs to keep seniors waiting in acute care for long-term care placements as opposed to building or expanding our long-term care facilities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's sort of an implication here that we are not building any long-term care facilities. That's absolutely incorrect. I can take the member, if she would like, on a little trip around the province. We've got facilities that are under way that I know of in the Minister of Justice's community, some 200 long-term care beds at Garrison Green in Calgary. I know that there's a facility in I think it's Stony Plain. There are several facilities that are under way in Edmonton that are joint ventures with a nonprofit society. There's lots of long-term care facility construction under way in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gosh, you know, I haven't had a chance to go on that kind of a little sojourn for a long time. I may take you up on it.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness. If long-term care beds were included in existing or new supportive living facilities which are getting the additional 400 units this year, that would certainly help to reduce the backlog in the hospitals and create the continuum of care within the facilities themselves. Has there been any consideration within the ministry to take action in that direction? In other words, within one building it would go from one end of the continuum to the other and also include long-term care beds, which probably should include palliative care.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is exactly right on the point that I've been trying to stress. I think I'll use the Strathmore example. We have invested significant dollars in Strathmore into assisted living through our seniors' housing program. Now what we have to do, working with the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks and the community, is ensure that the money that is committed to that facility is done in a way that we meet the needs of the community. But those needs are not just long-term care. That's why we're so happy with the extra dollars that were in yesterday's budget to deliver home care as a total package.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's half-baked budget proved this government has no intention of following through on their plan to end homelessness. It only put a hundred million dollars toward the \$3.2 billion that was promised, and even there it robbed that money from the affordable housing program. Only the most cynical of governments would cut from one homeless initiative to pay for another and then publicly congratulate itself in the process.

Why does the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs think that she can end the homeless epidemic by simply shuffling money around?

Mrs. Fritz: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad this question has been asked today. As you know, our 10-year plan to end homelessness for Alberta was released about two weeks ago. In that plan we said that we would increase housing options for the homeless. This budget for the very first time has money for homeless initiatives, for housing for the homeless. I am so pleased. In this budget the base funding has remained the same, but I can tell you that \$400 million over three years for housing units for the homeless is very welcome news to the community and the people that we serve.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that money was already there in the last budget. It was just called something else. All you did was change the name.

Now, at her March 16 photo shoot the minister made a big hullabaloo about her commitment to end homelessness, but this budget has exposed that there is not one new cent this year or any year to take Albertans out of the cold. That money was there before. How can the minister claim to endorse a plan to end homelessness when she's actually cut a hundred million from her affordable housing program this year?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I would love to meet with this member to explain the difference between housing for the homeless and affordable housing. There is \$400 million over three years for our homeless housing units. As well, there is \$468 million for affordable housing. That's \$868 million over three years to assist our most vulnerable people.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, they have simply changed the name. The money hasn't changed a bit. Meanwhile, the minister has cut half the funding from her affordable housing plan, as I've said. You've cut the homeless and eviction prevention fund by 50 per cent, and you've axed \$15 million from rent supplements. To the minister: when will you offer Alberta's homeless real help instead of just PR stunts and more smoke and mirrors?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, along with the capital housing dollars that I've explained to you are available for our homeless, which is \$400 million over three years, we also have funding of \$32 million for operating funding for the homeless. Along with that \$32 million we have the homeless and eviction prevention fund of \$34 million, which, as you know, was \$7 million two years ago. We also have the rent supplement funding, which is \$56 million dollars. You can see that there's over \$100 million in operating for our homeless initiatives as well as capital. It's good news.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. It's very important to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are supported during these challenging times. What are the implications of the budget on vulnerable Albertans, like persons with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this budget is proof of this government's commitment to assisting Albertans with disabilities who are most in need. Here's the proof: the maximum AISH benefit has

increased by \$100 per month effective April 1 of this year. This raises the maximum monthly benefit for AISH clients to \$1,188 per month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is real help for those that need it.

My second question to the same minister: can AISH clients look forward to receiving more increases in the future?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about our commitment to the AISH program. This is the fifth increase in five years, and this is the third increase under this Premier. My ministry is committed to reviewing the AISH financial assistance program every two years to ensure that we are providing the right supports. In total about 38,000 AISH clients have a better quality of life because of the AISH benefits that they receive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. There are, however, AISH clients who need more support than the \$1,188. What about them?

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this is another example of our support for vulnerable Albertans. On top of the monthly income benefit, the AISH program offers supplementary assistance for medical needs, needs such as travel to medical appointments and special diets. An emergency benefit is also available to provide assistance in situations that present a serious health or safety risk.

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

Major Community Facilities Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After two years, coincidentally surrounding an election, of gigantic photo-op cheques being strategically handed out by Tories, the major community facilities program has come to an end. This program worked well for government members, including the members for Banff-Cochrane and Foothills-Rocky View and Airdrie-Chestermere, so it seems as though the government got its money's worth. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What happens to those organizations who had grants in the pipeline for this program awaiting confirmation but not finalized as of year-end?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, those groups will be notified by my department that the program has been discontinued. For those that qualify under the community facility enhancement program, we'd ask to have their application transferred to that. The program was a two-year program. There was \$240 million that we put in there, \$480 million of ask, and \$2 billion worth of projects. I think we did a great job for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, aside from the excellent photo ops and the helpful timing this grant program gave government members, did the program complete the inventory of needed repairs of major facilities in this province?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question is absolutely ridiculous. We've had 350,000 new people to this province in the last four and a half years, and we will always have new needs for major construction and major facilities all across the province, whether in rural or urban Alberta. That's the way it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. I note that a number of major facilities are still in dire need of maintenance and upgrading – not new facilities, just maintenance and upgrading – like, for example, the Varscona Theatre in Edmonton or Catalyst Theatre. Is this the end of government assistance with a higher level of funding for community facilities, or is another fund available to groups like the Varscona? The CFEP and CIP are lower amounts of money. There's a cap on them. Is the higher funding gone completely?

Mr. Blackett: Your Leader of the Opposition asked for us to have discipline in spending. You wanted better value for the taxpayers' dollars, and now you want us to spend more. We had a two-year program. We've done it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Education Property Tax

(continued)

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Some cities are saying that they need to keep education property taxes, that they collect on behalf of the province, for their budgetary needs. Can the minister explain why the province does not allow municipalities to keep these taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we all benefit from the education taxes collected. I need to be clear that the education taxes are not municipal revenue. Education taxes are very clearly collected on behalf of the province to support the education system. Those taxes are pooled in the Alberta school foundation fund, and they are distributed equally on a per-student basis to school boards throughout this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Does this 5.2 per cent, or \$85 million, increase in the funds collected pay for things like new schools or renovations?

Mr. Danyluk: No, Mr. Speaker. The funds that are collected by taxation are to help cover the costs of teacher salaries, textbooks, and other classroom resources. These funds are not used for capital expenditures. At the outset I'd also like to say that it does not go towards the teachers' pension fund. This fund is used for the education of students.

Mr. Sandhu: My final question is also to the same minister. Can the minister explain how Edmonton is benefiting from the collection of these taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I look at the city of Edmonton, the city of Edmonton contributes in the neighbourhood of \$315

million. The increase will impact Edmonton in the neighbourhood of \$3.75 a month per average household. But the important part for the city of Edmonton: they will realize \$968 million that we reinvest back into the Edmonton public school system. This investment is an investment in our future.

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

Support for Public Transit

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investing in public transit is a good thing for the economy and a good thing for the environment. Such investment is consistently ranked at the top of possible green stimulus investment. It is one of the best ways of improving economies, setting the stage for decades of green growth. To the Minister of Transportation: how did the minister fail so badly to advocate for transit spending that Albertans will end up with only \$10 million of guaranteed money going towards public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it just always amazes me how they can always pick up some unbelievable, negative point when they don't even understand what the program is to begin with. There's \$10 million in this budget this year. We're just out on the second round of consultations right now. This is a pay-as-you-go situation, and no matter what would get approved, it doesn't need all the money in the first year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was \$2 billion, and \$2 billion could have gone a long way to improve our public transit system.

When the budgets are tight, value for money is key. What studies does the minister have to show that the value that public transit offers with its stimulus role and its emissions reduction is worth such a low commitment of \$10 million?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Green TRIP was never ever put out there to be part of a stimulus package of any kind. It was there to reduce greenhouse gases by getting rid of tailpipe emissions, and we're still going to be waiting for the proper innovation to come in and what type of public transit will work in putting bums in the seats of public transit and getting cars off the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are so many projects that are shovel ready. I think that with funding they could be started right away, and that will stimulate the economy, create very badly needed jobs. To the minister again: why is the minister so happy to sign long-term, multibillion-dollar P3 debt contracts building roads but completely fails to provide adequate funding for public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to explain to the hon. member across there that public transit has always – always – been the responsibility of municipalities. As our great leader, our hon. Premier, announced, he has brought out \$2 billion that was going to be for public transit, to help all municipalities with their transit to get rid of tailpipe emissions. We're still saying that public transit is a great thing, and we're going to help municipalities with that.

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

Support for Immigrant Seniors

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirteen per cent of the Canadian population is 65 years of age and over, and between 20 and 25 per cent of the population are immigrants. Many of them have made contributions in the labour market as caregivers, educators, or community volunteers. However, many face challenges such as language barriers, ethnic and cultural differences. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. As Alberta is now the third-largest immigrant-receiving province in Canada, after Ontario and British Columbia, what programs and services does the ministry have in place to respond to the needs of immigrant seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of benefits for seniors in this country. This assistance is focused on assisting those low-income seniors who are most in need regardless of where they come from. The assistance ranges from monthly payments to supplement federal benefits to help with dental work, prescription eyeglasses, and one-time or extraordinary expenses such as things like furnace and roof repairs.

2:40

Ms Woo-Paw: What is your ministry doing to help build the capacity of the seniors care sector so that the needs of the diverse ethnic and cultural communities in this province are met?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, one of my priorities as minister responsible for seniors is helping to build the supply of continuing care spaces. A few weeks ago I announced \$119 million in capital funding to help build and modernize 3,000 supportive living and lodge units in communities across Alberta. These projects were approved for funding, including Oi Kwan Place in Calgary, which was approved for \$3 million to help build new supportive living units and to add to and renovate an existing facility. Partnerships like Oi Kwan and Wing Kei in Calgary help us cater to the specific cultural needs of seniors.

Ms Woo-Paw: Immigrant seniors and relevant stakeholders want to ensure that their voices are heard in the development of seniors' policies in this province. Can the minister tell the Assembly what avenue is available to Alberta seniors to share their views with government?

Mrs. Jablonski: The first thing I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I certainly enjoy being invited to any facility to discuss these needs with all of our seniors. I have been to Wing Kei and certainly enjoyed being shown how they cater to the cultural needs for Chinese seniors. I think it's a wonderful program.

Any senior can also speak to their local MLA and to the Seniors Advisory Council as well. We have a seniors' information line, where they can make known their concerns, and that seniors' line is 1-800-642-3853.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate any invitation any time to visit these facilities and our seniors.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to table today with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies, five copies, of Travel Alberta's first business plan as a legislated corporation. Travel Alberta is the tourism marketing agency of the government of Alberta, and this business plan outlines the activities that the corporation will undertake over the next three years to position Alberta on the world stage as a premier tourism destination.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter dated July 10, 2008. It's a letter that I received from the Chief Electoral Officer, and it's regarding polling station No. 074 in Edmonton-Gold Bar during the March 3, 2008, election.

The second letter to be tabled is dated July 11, 2008. It's a letter that I have written to the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the conduct of the election on March 3, 2008, in Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The next tabling I have is a letter dated July 16, 2008. It is a response from the Chief Electoral Officer to some of the questions that I had raised earlier.

My final tabling is from the Government Accountability Office of the United States. It's a release that was delivered on Tuesday, March 17, 2009. It's titled Oil and Gas Leasing: Federal Oil and Gas Resource Management and Revenue Collection in Need of Comprehensive Reassessment.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I'd first like to table the appropriate number of copies of a CBC news story dated March 6, 2009, which backs up information I provided in my questions on March 19. The story describes how the U.K. established a four-hour maximum for emergency room waits. A key part of the solution was opening thousands of new long-term care beds in nursing homes to free up acute-care beds for emergency room patients.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona, Samara Jones. She says that Alberta is well placed to become part of the global trend towards renewable energy, if they only would, and that we should try to put people to work by building the green economy.

Finally, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. They indicate where residents were left in bed, received their meals late, and were unable to receive baths.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2008 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report January 1 to December 31, 2007, and pursuant to the Health Professions Act Alberta College of

Medical Diagnostic & Therapeutic Technologists 2008 annual report and the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2008.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are in the month of April. It's the eighth day. Each month of the year has special commemorations and special days, and it's my custom, basically, when we're sitting, to alert members to this. It also assists us in advising individuals who call our offices and want to know if recognition has been given. So this is recognition for these events in the month of April.

April is Earth Month. It features Daffodil Days. It's also National Cancer Awareness Month. It's also Irritable Bowel Syndrome Awareness Month. It's also Parkinson's Awareness Month. It's International Autism Awareness Month. It's National Oral Health Month. It's National Poetry Month.

It featured, of course, April Fool's Day. April 2 was World Autism Awareness Day. April 2 was International Children's Book Day. April 3 featured the Alberta Easter Seals campaign event in Calgary. April 3 and 4 featured the National 30-hour Famine event sponsored by World Vision Canada. April 4 was International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

April 5 was Palm Sunday. April 5 to 11 is National Wildlife Week that we've heard today. April 6 to 12 is Young Poets' week. April 7 was World Health Day. April 7 was also Unpaid Work Day. Today, April 8, at sunset begins Passover for all of our neighbours and our friends and Albertans of Jewish heritage, which will continue through to April 16 nightfall. April 9, tomorrow, is National Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. April 10, of course, is Good Friday. April 10 to 16 is World Homeopathy Awareness Week. April 11 is World Parkinson Day.

April 12, of course, is Easter Sunday. April 13 is Easter Monday. April 16 will be World Voice Day as it will be National Law Day. April 17 will be Equality Day in Canada and World Hemophilia Day. April 18 will be World Heritage Day.

April 19 is Orthodox Easter Sunday. April 19 to 25 is National Volunteer Week as it is National Dental Hygienists Week as it is Administrative Professionals Week, including Administrative Professionals Day on April 22. It also is National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week, and it also is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week. April 19 to May 3 is March of the Living in remembrance of the Holocaust. April 20 to 25 is National Soil Conservation Week. April 20 to 26 is Global Action Week. April 21 we will commemorate Yom-ha-Shoah, the Holocaust Memorial Day. April 21 is also the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. April 22 is Earth Day. April 23 is Canada Book Day as it is World Book and Copyright Day. April 23 to 29 is United Nations Global Road Safety Week. April 24 to 26 is Global Youth Service Day. April 25 is World T'ai Chi and Qigong Day. April 25 is also World Malaria Day.

April 25 to May 2 is National Immunization Awareness Week. April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day. April 26 to May 2 is Education Week in the province of Alberta and it also is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and it also is International Astronomy Week. April 28 is International Workers' Memorial Day. April 29 is International Noise Awareness Day, and April 29 is International Dance Day.

At that point we ran out of time to do further research, but we'll find some more in the next number of days.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Debate adjourned April 7: Dr. Swann]

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my responsibility and privilege to rise and respond to the budget. I'm pleased to do so this afternoon on behalf of the people of Alberta and as Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget the opposition cannot support. When last year the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, our former leader, responded to Budget 2008, his comments were that future historians may look back on the budget and say: "This is when Alberta finally lost its chance to build a sustainable future. This is when [they] failed to take advantage of their last opportunity [perhaps] to adapt to a changing world." Unfortunately for all of us, the hon. member's comments were prescient.

After years of record surpluses granted by oil and gas revenues, this administration has at last proven their utter inability beyond all doubt to transform the largest surpluses in our history within a few short months. We now have one of the largest deficits in provincial history, and in fact this administration can't tell us the true size of the deficit. A number of areas, including health budget deficits from last year, are not included in the budget this year.

No one can blame the Premier's administration for the global economic decline, but when we examine the root causes of this global decline, we find the same lack of discipline, regulation, transparency, and accountability displayed by this Conservative administration over the last 15 years. This administration has shown no long-term vision. Plans shift with the times. They've allowed the heritage fund to stagnate, and they've refused to discipline themselves and implement a savings plan. This administration has created chaos in the health system and gone into deficit to do so. They've left us more vulnerable than ever to volatile energy prices, and the only reassurance offered is the hope that things will be better next year. Rather than lead us out of this mess, the administration is counting on chance to do the job for them.

My background as a professional prepared me to do a number of things in dealing with challenges and issues that relate to the well-being of people and their communities. Surely, learning to live within one's means is a responsible goal for all of us: individuals, families, and businesses. It requires a clear vision, a plan, and the discipline to carry out the plan amidst the din of demands and needs and wants.

Yet there are times when borrowing, going into deficit or longer term debt, is appropriate for lasting values that benefit the long term, in this case the long-term public interest. I don't have an issue with deficits when they're needed, but for Alberta to be in a deficit situation is now truly a travesty of leadership and governance. This Premier's administration has mismanaged so badly that we went from the biggest boom in history to one of the largest deficits in our history within a span of less than a year. That is overwhelming evidence of leadership failure and the squandering of such opportunity. If Alberta had true leadership rather than simply a caretaker administration, there is no way we'd be talking about deficits and debt today.

As a physician my goal was healthier individuals and healthier communities. A common approach relates to budget setting. We define the problem; we gather information, the best information available; we seek the opinions of experts, consider the options, propose a diagnosis, and set a plan of action in place, a plan that is

not rigid but responds to ongoing information gathered from a monitoring process, dealing with unintended consequences, side effects, of a plan that isn't quite yet there. That sort of systematic, comprehensive approach to public policy is missing in this government and, certainly, the disciplined approach to serving the public interest for the long term.

A responsible government controls its spending, saves a percentage of its nonrenewable resource wealth so that we can live off the interest rather than the principal, and plans for future generations. One could look at Alaska and Norway as examples of resource-dependent cultures who found fiscal discipline to save for the future. Both these places had a plan. They stuck to it, and this cushioned them from the ups and downs that we're experiencing today. Alberta, on the other hand, remains after decades completely at the mercy of oil and gas fluctuations.

This administration has claimed many times that Alberta is in better shape than other provinces facing this economic downturn. Simply not true. Our neighbours all across the prairies are doing better than we are. In fact, we're far more vulnerable – far more vulnerable – than the government is letting on. Our dependence on the oil and gas sector makes us inherently more vulnerable. When that one sector takes a hit, everyone suffers.

Our government's stubborn refusal to diversify or plan for the future has had predictable results. They've failed to adequately consult conventional oil and natural gas producers on royalty changes, creating anger in our oil patch, especially conventional oil and gas, including service companies and their staff. Recently this government has flip-flopped on that very regime, pleasing some players in the industry but now creating long-term uncertainty for the entire sector.

Recently the Official Opposition brought a small fraction of this administration's extravagant spending to light: millions of dollars in bonuses paid out to senior officials, even in departments that have clearly failed to deliver value for money such as health care and children's services. Only when we exposed the affair did the government do anything. A responsible government would have understood the hypocrisy of asking Albertans to tighten their belts, especially those most disadvantaged, while handing out huge bonuses to well-connected senior officials. A real leader would have halted the bonus program not because his administration was embarrassed but because it's the right thing to do.

A responsible government, for that matter, would stick to the budget, something this government has consistently failed to do since I entered the Legislature and for years before, making budgets meaningless as planning tools and helping explain why this government has been so bad at planning. How much stock can Albertans put in this budget? I'll not be surprised if the government's plans change completely by the time the first-quarter update rolls around. Albertans deserve and want a government that follows through. They need a government that is accountable and professional about managing one of the largest budgets in Canadian history.

There is another deficit here, a character deficit: the lack of fiscal discipline. They've had the greatest opportunity in history to save for Alberta's future, for our children's children's children, and they've blown it. We have spent virtually all the nonrenewable resource wealth taken from the ground in the last 16 years, and instead of saving it, we have spent it away, leaving us as well as our children profoundly vulnerable.

An Alberta Liberal government would not have failed the public. Alberta Liberals still believe that a savings plan, as we have said over and over, is essential to Alberta's future, especially during times like this. You don't stop contributing to your RRSP because of an economic slowdown. Families are more prudent than that.

This administration could use some of that prudence. Instead, we have watched the heritage fund stagnate and decline and likely will do so for a few more years.

Albertans have a right to know where their money is being spent and what the resource result is for each dollar. This administration must perform an independent value-for-money audit if it values the public fiduciary responsibility, an independent audit, not an embedded audit that purports to save \$250 million by slashing benefits that were intended to help the homeless while keeping the horse-racing industry subsidies alive and well. Does this administration truly believe that Albertans place a higher value on horse racing than on helping the homeless?

3:00

For every dollar that British Columbia spends, we spend \$1.28. What are we getting for that extra money? Where is the evidence of our money being spent wisely and leaving a legacy that we can be proud of for future generations? Clearly, there is waste and imprudent spending, far more than just this \$250 million admitted in this budget. An independent, transparent audit, open to the people, will provide assurances and rebuild some of the lost trust that is needed in this province. We don't expect the administration to establish this independent audit. It would be too incriminating and uncomfortable. This is a government that has truly lost its way and confuses self-interest and partisan gain with the public interest.

Do we support going into debt during these extraordinary times? We need to stimulate our economy. We owe it to our working families and to others to ensure that we leave no one behind. We support limited debt financing of infrastructure when necessary, but it has to be prudent, and it has to be followed by a clear, planned timeline for repayment, with a value-for-dollar audit, after we've examined areas to improve in this province. We do not support public-private partnerships.

When I responded to the Speech from the Throne earlier this year, I said that the primary purpose of government must be to serve the long-term public interest. This administration is not serving that purpose. They've instead served up a budget that is full of unjustified optimism, short-term interests, and short on details so that Albertans can plan for their future, a more sustainable future. All we know is that the Conservative government will take "corrective action" if revenues don't rise soon, meaning either tax hikes or deep cuts to public services or both. Creative action: the new euphemism for the pain this administration is preparing to pass on to Albertans, Albertans who played no part in the bad management.

I've noted before the case of Easter Island, whose inhabitants had no vision and depended on one resource for their prosperity and harvested that resource till it was gone, whose civilization crumbled. Alberta is no island, yet this administration seems determined to act as if it were, making us a virtual island, isolated from neighbours, dependent on a single, volatile resource, finding no common ground on issues as important as climate change. Now we see where this administration's approach has led us.

A few weeks ago the finance minister said that Alberta would lose 50 jobs a day. Well, we've lost an average of 500 jobs a day: 30,000 jobs lost in two months. Government predicted that we would lose just 15,000 this entire year, and we've doubled that. Economists now forecast that Alberta's economy will decline by 2.3 per cent this year, the largest decline of all the provinces. This one statistic reveals how vulnerable Alberta really is and how rosy the picture painted by this administration: a see-saw from having the highest rate of growth to the highest rate of decline within the short span of a few months.

Where is our long-term sustainability? Where is the stability that Albertans deserve? What will happen to Albertans when the next

budget comes? Already the government is cutting back on health care spending, and we haven't even seen the health deficit yet. Forget about the extra hospital capacity that our cities so desperately need. We are in serious trouble here, and our most vulnerable citizens will pay the price for this administration's failures.

Alberta's prosperity is almost completely dependent again on our fossil fuel revenues, yet no one in government seems to see this as a problem to move us into the 21st century with renewable energy efficiency as a priority, an investment stimulus package that sees this as our responsibility not only to Albertans but to the planet. This will remain a long-term valuable commodity. It cannot and must not continue to drive everything that we do in this province.

This administration created a highly inflationary economy by failing to provide leadership in our oil sands development. As we continue to pay inflated costs of development today, we are still somewhat reduced in our capacity to respond to the global recession. Now the government is scrambling for answers. They have spent on trivial interests – including bonuses, horse racing, and golf subsidies – while leaving infrastructure to corrode and collapse, that Albertans are paying through the nose to catch up on, and failed to set aside enough savings to get us through this.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time of accountability. As I mentioned earlier, the global economic downturn is not the government's fault, but this administration is responsible for the lack of preparation for a day that everyone knew was coming. Most Albertans know from past experience, and this government should too, that booms are short-lived. Unfortunately, "most Albertans" does not include members of this administration. Albertans want a government that is committed to hard work, transparency, and accountability; that measures short- and long-term risks and benefits; that invests in people, business, and the environment with a view to the future; that guides the market, does not become a slave to the market; that's balanced and responsible in its development of resources; and especially now in this economic downturn, invests in new technology, research, and opportunities for the future, including responsible bitumen upgrading here in the province, buses, light rail transit, and energy efficiency. This will serve us and our children into the future.

Where is the leadership? We are moving into a knowledge economy in the 21st century, and we are still lagging behind most of the world because of our fixation on one resource. This isn't going to be easy, but forward-thinking, imaginative leadership isn't about making easy choices. It's about making the right choices. This takes courage, entrepreneurial spirit, and a bold vision of healthy communities, which most Albertans have come to understand and participate in. They need policy and government leadership to back it up and support it for future generations.

My vision, Mr. Speaker, includes a province that has, indeed, healthy people working together, sharing the responsibilities of protecting present and future generations and including in their vision opportunities for economic, social, and environmental protection for the future. Our public institutions and programs and services all contribute to our high quality of life and our competitiveness as social beings.

Education is critical. It is the investment that we can make in future generations. Innovation and technology are part of that. Our children expect us to invest in those, not to leave them to crippling debt, especially at times when they are having difficulty getting jobs and raising the kind of income that will help them to find security.

As a physician I know from experience that good health is the result of many, many factors. As a politician I want to lead a government that recognizes and addresses these factors in creating a healthy Alberta. Healthy communities are the source of our

security, our social well-being, and our future. Our mutual interdependence and our honouring of diversity will allow us to build a truly healthy Alberta. We look to government to demonstrate those kinds of collaborative, consultative, courageous aspects of leadership.

Business has played and will continue to play a huge role in our quality of life, and the freedom for business to thrive is vital. My father worked in the oil patch for decades, and I know the contributions that he and his company made to Alberta. We're deeply grateful to the many industrial and commercial sectors that have created the kinds of jobs and sustainable, safe, clean environment that we have depended upon. We call on government to stimulate and protect that legacy for future generations. Business taxes fuel our hospitals and schools, provide jobs and training, research and development. Business will be our most important partner in the crucial work of diversifying Alberta's economy, especially with regard to green technology.

3:10

Secondly, I believe in fairness to future generations. For too long governments in Alberta have embraced short-term goals, cutting programs in bad times and spending exorbitantly in the good times without a thoughtful, prudent, and courageous approach to the long term. This short-sightedness is an abdication of this generation's first duty to the next: to provide a lasting legacy and an uncompromised future for our children and our grandchildren. They have the same desire for prosperity; the same need for clean air, water, and land; and the same fundamental right to a vibrant, living democracy as well as the same need to live and grow and learn to meet their potential. Those aspirations cannot be met if we squander today's opportunities and demonstrate a lack of leadership, vision, and discipline.

So much has been lost. We think about the nonrenewable resource wealth that we have failed to invest appropriately. Our duty must be to leave a social, environmental, educational, and economic legacy that our children can grow with. The gift of fossil fuels is finite, but the legacy need not be if only we start saving now.

Alberta's interests are not served by a tired caretaker administration lacking in new ideas and lacking the courage to change the direction we've been taking. We see now what happens when career politicians, ideologically driven, are stuck in the past. What Alberta needs is courageous leadership, bold leadership that will bring a smart, hard-working, honest government to Alberta, leadership that will make the tough, ethical choices considering present and future generations and will stick to budgets that they commit to and plans they make.

Albertans are entrepreneurial, and they stand by their word. They will hold us accountable for standing by our word. We need to build a new future: leadership that believes in honesty, transparency, fair dealing, and every opportunity for democracy to thrive for every voice, Albertans with different views, and every gathering to be honoured and considered. Good leadership involves identifying the important things and helping the community to come along to share their views on what is important and where we need to move forward. Good leadership includes thoughtful, comprehensive analysis of the facts and a viewing and a balancing of public values to create the public policy that should serve us in present and future generations. We've been missing that thoughtful, comprehensive analysis in this province, and it's reflected in this budget. Leadership must truly understand that decisions we make today have very profound impacts on future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta could be so much greater. With real leadership we could build a sustainable future not only for this

province, not only for this country, but leadership in the world. We have the resources. We have the people. We have the infrastructure. What we need is the vision and the courage and the discipline to carry it out, a bold vision that calls on Albertans to work toward something greater than ourselves and greater than a resource-based economy of boom and bust, a vision that demands higher aspirations, a vision that transforms Alberta from stewards of oil and gas into a sustainable energy superpower and, even more, a diversified sustainable economy free of the turmoil of boom and bust, with an enviable environment, healthy and caring communities, and the best health care system, education system, and transportation system that links us, including a thriving arts and culture sector.

That leadership is on the way, Mr. Speaker. For now Albertans can only be astonished by the incredible shortcomings of this administration. Their colossal failure to anticipate and prepare for tough times shows that they are not true and faithful stewards of the public good. It shows that they do not have the wisdom, the foresight, and the character to manage this province's resources.

We will not be supporting this budget. I believe that most Albertans will also not support it. Thank you for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you wish to participate?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. But I wonder if we could briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

The Speaker: With the unanimous consent of the Assembly we can do that. Will all members allow us to revert to Introduction of Guests? Anybody opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and members of the House. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Bashir Ahmed, executive director and CEO of the Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization, or SCERDO. SCERDO works to promote and improve the quality of life for all Somalis and Canadians through education and community development. In 2007 SCERDO implemented a needs assessment survey of the Somali community in Edmonton. This assessment helped to determine the social, education, and health needs of Somali people who have recently moved to Alberta. I recently met with Mr. Ahmed, and I'm impressed with his commitment to a healthy and vibrant Somali community and to multiculturalism in our province. I would now ask that Mr. Ahmed rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

(continued)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two months ago the NDP caucus warned this House that the throne speech would fail

ordinary Albertans because it had no economic focus, no plan for real job creation, and no long-term solution to end Alberta's unsustainable dependency on fossil fuels. It fundamentally failed to acknowledge the tough economic realities that many Albertan families are facing increasingly every day.

Unfortunately, yesterday's budget continued down the same misguided path. This government's economic plan is ill-conceived and fails to recognize the depth of the recession in Alberta now and in the next several years. It ignores the needs of ordinary Albertans who are worried about their jobs and how they're going to pay for their mortgages at the end of each month in the upcoming year and the years to follow.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this is an incomplete budget. We would have thought that by delaying its introduction, the government would have had plenty of time to figure out all the numbers, but perhaps the finance minister's office needed one more all-nighter to get the job done. This budget calls for nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in further cuts in this year, and the government has no idea where to find them. Nothing causes more fear and uncertainty in the hearts and minds of working Albertans than the axe of potential job cuts looming over their necks. By not specifying where it will find this money, the government is forcing Alberta's families to prepare for the worst. This is certainly no way to encourage public confidence.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I do want to take a moment to give credit where credit is due. I was listening when the minister talked about the AISH budget. We are pleased to see the increase of \$100 per month in AISH funding that we have been calling for included in this year's budget. Certainly, this additional funding is necessary, and those who are eligible to receive it will be very appreciative.

I only wish the same could be said for Albertans in general. What ordinary Albertans wanted was a jobs budget; what we got was a welfare budget. Over 30,000 people in Alberta are turning to welfare every month, and that number is steadily growing. In December alone 4,000 new names were added to the list. Given what is in this budget, those numbers are very likely to increase.

Yesterday's budget once again begged Albertans to have confidence in this government but offered them nowhere to find it. Mr. Speaker, this government just doesn't get it. If they did, we'd have seen a far different budget, not this business-as-usual plan and cuts to the services that regular Albertans depend on. This government is almost alone in its failure to create a plan for economic stimulus. It is irresponsible of the government to deny the severity of this recession. If this government ever would just take off their rose-coloured glasses, they'd realize that beyond the shelter of this dome the situation is getting pretty desperate for many Albertan families.

Virtually every financial forecaster is telling us that we need to prepare for an ongoing and difficult recession, but the Premier and his cabinet continually spin the idea that everything is going to be just fine. The reality is that regular people who just one year ago thought they were managing all right are now beginning to fall behind. At the supermarket where they once bought meat and vegetables, they're buying more Kraft Dinner. At the bank where they once had their savings, their rainy-day funds are drying up, and they can't get a loan. In the home where families once found comfort, they are now struggling to make ends meet.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, already this year more than 30,000 Albertans have lost their jobs, and this government doesn't care. In just two months

that figure doubled what this government had predicted for job losses in the entire year. These are average, hard-working people who did everything right. They showed up to their jobs on time day after day, and they worked hard to provide for themselves and their loved ones, but it wasn't enough. When they look to this government for help, they're given directions to the unemployment office and shown a budget that puts corporate interests first.

There's good reason for them to be worried. The government still needs to find nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in cuts in this year's budget and over \$2 billion in next year's budget. This half-baked budget flies in the face of the Premier's commitment to openness and transparency. If this government was serious about being accountable, they would have increased funding for the Auditor General. They would have realized that given the tools, the AG can find savings like no one else. He may embarrass the government from time to time, but the outcome is better-run programs that don't waste the public's money. By eliminating the Wild Rose Foundation, the government has politicized funding of charitable organizations. It is now another tool to reward the government's friends and punish those who aren't.

Our party is the only one in this House that did any meaningful consultation with real people. The NDP invited a wide cross-section of Albertans, including small business owners, farmers, teachers, parents, health care and seniors' advocates, workers, labour organizations, energy and environmental groups to come together for a round-table on the budget to discuss their needs. We did this because our party is committed to protecting the services that people depend on.

People told us that this government must quickly catch up to the realities of the 21st century and begin by making the fundamental shift towards an economy that is based on renewable energy. This new paradigm is the transition upon which the successful long-term future of Alberta's economy is based. We know that Alberta cannot abandon our use of fossil fuels overnight. The tar sands are key to Alberta's economy in the near and medium term, but they come with many challenges. Because of this government's insistence on the lowest royalties in the world, hundreds of billions of dollars that rightfully belong to the people of Alberta are slipping through its fingers. By refusing to demand that bitumen be processed here at home, the Conservatives are ensuring that jobs will be created south of the border rather than here in Alberta. By refusing to clean up the black eye that is the toxic tailings ponds and greenhouse gases being emitted by the tar sands, this government is jeopardizing the international markets for Alberta energy that it is depending on to pull us out of recession. We need also to come up with a plan for the long run, one for a day when fossil fuels are no longer the driving force of world economies.

When we asked about the big picture, about the issues that extend beyond the dinner table, round-table participants routinely identified three areas of concern: jobs and the state of our economy, the environment and green energy, and the future of health care and seniors' care. Regular Albertans want real solutions with measurable results. They do not want \$2 billion wasted on a carbon capture program that even the big oil producers in the tar sands have rejected as an ineffective expenditure. They don't want government to fund corporate tax cuts and pet projects like horse racing by axing the programs that families depend on like the natural gas rebate program for others that have jeopardized the integrity of our health care system and our education and our seniors' programs.

They demand that this government follow through on creating actual new long-term care beds that they promised and not simply replacing ones that have been eliminated from older facilities. Common sense tells them that when you move people out of general

care into the long-term beds that they need, this in turn frees up space for those sleeping on stretchers in emergency room hallways or waiting up to 24 hours before they can receive treatment, which they need, in an emergency room.

Ordinary Albertans who are worried about their jobs are also concerned that this budget further shows how this government has absolutely no commitment to a serious strategy for our homeless. We know times are going to be tough, that job losses are going to mount. What we don't know is how those who are only a paycheck away from living on the street are going to cope. This budget's answers to these fears is to strip money from affordable housing programs in order to fund merely a fraction of their previous public commitments to solving the homelessness crisis in our province. Mr. Speaker, they're robbing Peter to pay Paul. Simply moving around between accounts does nothing to create the affordable housing that is going to be needed to address the growing number of Albertans without jobs. Financial experts the world over tell us that the best way to stimulate the economy and create long-term jobs is through infrastructure spending. According to CIBC World Markets every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure spending has the potential to create up to 11,000 jobs.

Leading up to this budget the NDP made a number of proposals to stimulate growth through infrastructure investment. They included redirecting the funds earmarked for carbon capture and storage into energy retrofits for public buildings and homes across Alberta. Another \$500 million of that money would be set aside to create a renewable energy research council based in Calgary. Finally, \$6.6 billion would have been leveraged for municipal infrastructure projects that would create over 70,000 jobs.

We propose that the province pay the municipal portion of a federal proposal to match funding for infrastructure programs. By doing so, municipalities across the province will be able to get moving on countless projects they have waiting in the wings, ranging from public transportation initiatives to bridges, roadways, new public buildings, and the retrofitting of old ones. Instead, this government went 180 degrees in the wrong direction and cut a hundred million dollars to capital infrastructure grants to municipalities. At a time when the cost of building is the least expensive, this government fails to take advantage. Mr. Speaker, what a missed opportunity.

There are other examples of how smart spending can stimulate Alberta's economy, opportunities this government has overlooked. The developments of green energy, retrofitting of homes and public buildings as well as investment in universal public health care are proven methods of rebuilding our economy. The protection of Alberta's environment is inextricably linked to the revitalization of our economy. Both initiatives are long-term plans that will benefit future generations, but they need to be initiated now.

The NDP has proposed various initiatives to attain the long-term goal of making Alberta the green energy hub for North America, all of which are aimed at weaning the province off fossil fuels and beginning the transition to renewable energy. The right initiatives begun today would greatly reduce our dependency on fossil fuel sources, so much so that the Pembina Institute conservatively estimates that Alberta could transition from a 70 per cent coal-based energy economy to a 70 per cent renewable energy economy by the year 2028. Such a transition would not only reduce Alberta's carbon footprint but create a new employment incubator that would maintain Alberta's advantage for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, ordinary Albertans have also expressed concern over the future of our public health care system. This government's plan to restructure health care through the delisting of services that people need results in excluding those who are less fortunate and on fixed

incomes. It also often represents false economies when incomplete treatment plans result in readmission of patients to hospitals. Universal public health care has always been highly valued by all Albertans. A system that provides services for some and suffering for others is simply not acceptable. Our health system must be protected, not dismantled and sold off in pieces to the highest bidder. Little by little services like chiropractic care are being delisted, which means that costs are skyrocketing for ordinary Albertans, leaving them unable to access the health care they need.

This government is forging ahead with an agenda that dissolves rural health services, closes long-term care beds, increases hospital wait times, and leaves multimillion-dollar facilities like the Mazankowski Heart Institute sitting empty.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's NDP will not be voting in favour of this budget. We've spoken to regular Albertans, and in good conscience we cannot support the failed direction that this government is taking us. This budget should have been all about investments to protect the future of our great province. There was an opportunity in this budget to create thousands of new jobs, and this government squandered it. There was a chance to create a real shift in our energy sector to spur on research and development in renewables, and this government missed it. There was a chance to ease the financial burden facing postsecondary students and seniors on fixed incomes, and this government missed the boat.

Alberta's NDP remains committed to standing up for these things, to representing the values and needs of ordinary Albertans, not the well-connected friends and insiders of this government. The NDP is listening to regular Albertans, Mr. Speaker, even when this government turns a deaf ear.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anybody who wishes to comment.

Hearing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: We are debating amendment A3. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have several amendments to Bill 18 in front of me. It would be very helpful if you could clarify which of the various amendments is actually A3.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had moved that Bill 18 be amended in section 2 by striking out subsection (7) and substituting the following: (7) Section 293.4 is repealed. That is amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for pointing that out.

There have been several concerns raised with regard to Bill 18, and I appreciate the hon. leader of the third party trying to do what needs to be done in terms of repairing a flawed piece of legislation.

What is asked for is adding the following clause: "Providing that a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act does not apply in respect of extra-provincial corporations." There is a major concern that the lowest common denominator, the least worker friendly, the least municipality-responsible types of trade will occur on a cross-border basis. In other words, if the wage for a certain practice is lower in B.C., then likewise Alberta might consider adopting it.

Unfortunately, the reverse is not true. For example, B.C. has a lower driver's insurance rate because it's a public insurance, and therefore it provides a better service at a lower rate. Also, B.C. has a much stronger pharmacare program. Again, if it were an even trade-off in terms of what's the best value for Albertans and British Columbians not just in terms of trade mobility but in recognition of the rights of local municipalities, then I could be more supportive of the TILMA than I currently am.

The amendments go on to strike out clause (a) and substitute the following: (a) in clause (c) by striking out "requirements referred to in section 382 . . . from cooperatives" and substituting "matters referred to in section 382." Obviously, a tremendous amount of thought has gone into putting forward this amendment and, again, attempting to ensure that our trade mobility is beyond just strictly a labour agreement and recognizes the values and the strengths of both provinces, British Columbia and Alberta.

This bill, while debated thoroughly in the British Columbia Legislature, will not have received the debate, and where we're at in this stage is basically one step before passing a piece of legislation which does not protect local municipalities. It will not, for example, guarantee Calgary's fair wage policies, which city workers on a permanent basis receive. Again, the city of Calgary could be challenged by labour groups in British Columbia wishing to provide a similar contracted-out service to the city but at a lower rate, and therefore that undermines the credibility, the integrity, and the accountability of areas like the city of Calgary.

I'm sure the city of Edmonton and other municipalities are considering fair labour agreements, too. The fact that amongst so many other parts of the bill the government can reach back into history and erase up to three years' previous recommendations and then, again, leave it to the minister to make the final adjustments or changes to regulations without any debate in this Assembly continues to be a concern.

I support what the hon. member of the third party is attempting to do in terms of creating greater responsibility and accountability within amendment A3 to Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to participate and for your clarification of the amendment. As I say, I had several before me and was not sure which one was being debated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will now speak to the bill. Does anyone wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I won't prolong this because it's obviously a majority decision, as democracy should be, and beyond a doubt this piece of legislation is going to go forward. However, I hope the minister of labour and the minister of government services have some form of escape clause if B.C., for example, or organizations within B.C. challenge municipalities in court over the contracting out of services over the wages paid, over the delivery of insurances. For example, someone from B.C. could very well say: "We're offering a public insurance. We have so many millions of subscribers in British Columbia. We would like to move that form of public insurance into the province of Alberta." That is actually something that I would welcome. But it would be my hope that this government has some way other than a firewall, which is not productive, of protecting Alberta businesses, Alberta municipalities, and the rights of Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have an amendment and the appropriate number of copies if I could pass those out, or do I read that in first and then pass them out?

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause while they're passed out.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment I am proposing is to allow the government to meet its stated goal of enhancing the current act's functionality and enforceability. To do this, problematic concessions that exempt communication initiated by a minister towards a lobbyist must be addressed. Although this was raised in the committee, I'd like to note that when the federal government eliminated a similar exemption, the reporting of bona fide lobbying increased tenfold. The amendment attempts to do just that by striking out clause (c) of the bill. That's what was passed out to my colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Do you wish to speak to it?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As everyone has a copy of the amendment now, it's pretty clear what this is trying to do. It's trying to eliminate the apparent loophole that exists that allows a lobbyist who is contacted by a member of cabinet and who is then called into his office or maybe to a meeting at some other place to get advice. This is now not necessarily needed to be recorded anywhere in the record books. This is such a clear, I guess, way to get around the bill that we present this amendment. We believe that it will allow for a more easily effective bill that will allow democracy to go forward in a much more simple way. It would allow for people to still do business but allow for the government as well as the lobbyist to be accountable. People would have an idea of who is meeting with government ministers, who is giving advice, who is spending time on various projects.

We have no trouble with government trying to access and get the best information possible. In fact, it would be silly to try and stand in the way. What we are trying to balance here is the fact that sometimes in democracy some people have too much influence over government members. That's why the Premier has often stated that his goal is openness and transparency, and that's a laudable goal. To do that, this act, the Lobbyists Act, I hope will be passed and I hope will be put into place. I hope that this is just the start of more things to come toward openness and transparency in this province. One step would be to accept this amendment right now and cut off that apparent loophole.

If we look at the balance that we're trying to strike, it's a difficult one in that we want openness and transparency in our government. As well, we want equal access and opportunity for individuals to go see our government members, and that includes our cabinet. At the same time we need to ensure that no one cabinet minister or no one member of the public has too much influence. That is what this amendment is trying to do. I believe it was cut off by the federal government when they closed this loophole. I think the statistics were that lobbying incidents were reported at a 10 times greater rate. So you can see that there is a need for this. The federal government found it wise to do so. It seems that the results were more proactive, more forthcoming, that people had an ability, then, to see who was coming into cabinet ministers' offices.

That's why I put forward the amendment. I'd encourage all members to add it to what is the start of a good bill and a good era, hopefully, of openness and accountability in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would encourage members not to support this amendment. This amendment would purport to remove a subsection of section 3. Section 3 of this amendment act essentially provides for some modest amendments to the section of the Lobbyists Act which outlines whom the act does not apply to, and the piece that the hon. member's amendment would remove is a piece which exempts from being lobbyists those people that a member of the House or a member of government might go out and ask for a viewpoint or an opinion on a topic.

Consultation is an essential part of what this government does. Talking to the public and asking the public to engage in consultations and seeking out views of the public is an absolutely essential part of the work that we do. That should not be confused with lobbying. The clarity that's provided in this act creates that understanding that when we go out as members of this Legislature

on the government or opposition side or when we go out as members of the government to seek the viewpoint of the public and specifically do that on either a general basis or a targeted basis, that should not be considered lobbying, and it should remain exempt. It's an essential part of the public process.

To suggest that the federal government not including it in their act has made their act more effective because they've had a more massive number of registrations is actually counting the wrong things. It's not the number of registrations that makes the Lobbyists Act effective; it's a question of what disclosure of lobbying is available to the public. With all due respect, seeking views on a targeted basis or a general basis from members of the public is not lobbying, and the section that's in the act is there to clarify that purpose.

This hon. member's amendment would take out a very essential section of the act, and I'd ask members not to support it.

Mr. Chase: When I began my concerns in discussion on Bill 2, the phrase I used was that when the government comes courting, there's no reporting. That's exactly what this amendment attempts to address. It wants to take away the backdoor approach where the government initiates a particular process.

I must say that initiating is not simply going out to the public or holding a forum. This is completely different. It's a form of reverse lobbying, particularly if dollars are involved. In the interest of transparency and accountability I am surprised that the Minister of Education, the Government House Leader, would not be in favour of transparency and accountability. When we do go out into the public, when either the government or members of the opposition hold forums or have discussions, it's a very public circumstance.

3:50

I'm not suggesting that meeting with a community association or going out and discussing with a constituent is a type of lobbying, but where the line of transparency and accountability is crossed is when there are dollars involved. If the activity is initiated by a Member of the Legislative Assembly with the notion of hiring a particular individual to provide a service, then that type of expenditure directed from an MLA should be recorded. What happens now is that while we're having greater transparency on the lobbyist side of things in terms of having them report – and we've gone through the process of exempting nonprofits, exempting community associations, exempting a whole variety of public service providers from having to be caught up in the so-called professional lobbyist act. The fact that the government can do all this behind closed doors with no accounting is a great concern.

Part of the reason the original bill came forward is that we've had a series of sort of lobbying/consulting type of circumstances. Kelley Charlebois, who is a former consultant for a previous minister of health who is now our representative in Washington, received contracts totalling very close to \$800,000 for advice. Sometimes it was a speech written for an individual for which \$700 was paid. We had other examples of individuals very closely connected to the government, like Rod Love, riding on private planes, promoting private lobbyist interests while, at the same time, having contracts with the government, but that wasn't considered a conflict of interest.

The power of the inner circle to influence outcomes and to control budgets is something that should be transparent and accountable to all taxpayers. Whether it's the lobbyist that's being registered, which is captured in the bill, or the government that is approaching an individual with whom they have a relationship and that individual is going to benefit financially from that connection, that information

has to be recorded. Otherwise, any kind of transparency, accountability – what we have, basically, is reverse influence peddling. The number of individuals who have been connected to the government and have been subsequently appointed to boards or commissions or found themselves connected with being electoral officers in certain areas – we have to account for what is described in the worst cases as patronage. We all know how strongly this government feels about appointments to the Senate as opposed to elections to the Senate, yet our Prime Minister has done just that.

If conservatism and accountability are going to stand on an equal plane, then it is extremely important that this amendment be accepted and that MLAs, whether they're on the opposition end of things or on the government side, account for the individuals with whom they are meeting who would directly benefit from a financial point or from a point of influence by meetings that are held in secret.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Chairman, just briefly. First of all, I resent the implication that I'm not in favour of openness or accountability, and I think the hon. member should retract that comment. It's absolutely unjustified. I've been a very strong proponent of open and accountable government and government consulting with the public and seeking viewpoints.

What the hon. member missed in my comments in his desire to get up and say what he was going to say anyway was that there are a number of different ways in which you consult with people with respect to public business. Some of that is, indeed, going out to community associations and public meetings, and some of it is what I would call targeted viewfinding. Going to an expert in an area to ask for a perspective should not put the person that you're going to ask for a perspective or a viewpoint in the position of being considered a lobbyist. A lobbyist by most people's definition is somebody who is coming to try and convince you of something, not somebody that you're going to seek expert advice, viewpoint, or perspective from.

A section of the act which excludes those people makes it clear that you're not a lobbyist just because I as a member of government or I as an MLA come and ask you for your view on a subject. That kind of viewpoint seeking is something that we as MLAs and we as ministers of government ought to be encouraged to do to get a wider viewpoint. In fact, I would suggest that the effect of this amendment that's being proposed would make it necessary for the Liberal opposition as I suspect that when we table a bill in the House, they do take the bill out to the people that they trust in the community for a viewpoint. I know they don't do all the work themselves. I know that they go and ask people for viewpoints on bills. The effect of this amendment would be to require them to have each and every one of the people they go and ask for a viewpoint on a bill to be registered as a lobbyist.

That's not what the lobbyist registry is about. The lobbyist registry is about making sure that the public knows, when a decision is being made in the public interest, if people are trying to affect how that decision is made in their own interest as a lobbyist or in the interest of somebody that they're paid to put a viewpoint forward for, that that is open and transparent. That's a very necessary piece of the Lobbyists Act, and that's provided for. But when we as legislators try to inform ourselves, when we as members of government, as ministers of the Crown try and get a broader perspective on issues that are before us as we craft legislation or policy, that should not be considered lobbying.

Therefore, when I go out to talk or any one of the members of government goes out to talk or any Member of the Legislative Assembly goes out to talk to somebody to seek an informed viewpoint, that should not be considered lobbying, and that's the effect of this section. The amendment that's being put forward would take that out and make all of those people lobbyists and force them to register or put them in a position where some of them would choose, quite appropriately, not to bother talking to us.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to ask the hon. Minister of Education and Government House Leader how you prevent the abuse, then, wherein by a simple device of saying that the MLA contacted the lobbyist, suddenly it's not a lobbyist anymore.

Mr. Hancock: There is no way to codify every aspect of behaviour and cover all contexts. In the context of what we do on behalf of the public, there's a certain element of trust involved that people do their jobs honourably. I know that the hon. member opposite tries often to besmirch the government's reputation, but the reality is that all of us do our jobs in an ethical and honourable manner, and that assumption has to be first and foremost.

Having said that, I think that if there was any question to be raised in any circumstance where there was a suggestion that lobbying had occurred and was inappropriate, the facts would speak for themselves as to who made the first contact and whether, in fact, it was a contact that was initiated by a member of government or by an MLA in order to seek out advice or whether it was an attempt to get around the law.

4:00

Any interpretation of the law starts from the premise that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. If the Lobbyists Act says that you must register as a lobbyist if you're going to lobby government, if you're going to lobby an MLA, you cannot in my view get around that just by saying: well, the MLA called me first, so I wasn't actually lobbying. If you're putting forward a private viewpoint, if you're putting forward a viewpoint in your best interest, I don't think that you can get around that by saying: well, the MLA called me first.

If, in fact, what is happening is that you wanted to create a position where you were lobbying for your interest, that is quite distinct and, I think, separable from the situation where, truly, we as MLAs want to reach out. I would be very surprised, hon. member, if you did not on a daily basis go out and ask people for their viewpoint on a bill or on a policy that's coming forward or on a potential budget issue. I would be very, very surprised if you wanted to register each and every one of those people that you talked to and put on them the onus to register themselves as a lobbyist.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The debate that's going on is very interesting. I would like to add my two bits as we go along. I hear the comments of the hon. House leader, yet it seems to me that the old argument of the slippery slope comes up. I understand the need for government members to get as much information as they can, to get appropriate people who have expertise on highways, on agriculture, on pesticides, on whatever it is that the government legislation or the government is going to be doing. That is fair enough.

Oftentimes the people with the knowledge, who have had 30 years of experience and 40 years of expertise in highways, have made it their private interest to know a lot about the building of highways,

a lot about, you know, putting on the cement and making them run smoothly, for example. Oftentimes the reason why they've made it their 30-year career or whatever is because they've had a business connection to that, or they've worked for some company or, in fact, own some company and have done lots of work on it. You can see why they would have that expertise. In those certain cases when the government member contacts that individual for information, yes, I think that it's a tremendously slippery slope for the government member to really say: "Well, this guy has the expertise, but I'm not really contacting him about his private interest. I'm merely getting information, and he's not really a lobbyist." I think it would be naive of us to consider that that situation does not exist. In fact, I would suggest that it exists frequently for government and cabinet members.

If we look at the reverse situation of the opposition parties, we do seek expertise from time to time in looking at government bills and legislation. Sure, I think we'd have an easy time considering maybe some of these people lobbyists, but at the same point in time they know that in coming to us and getting information, we're not going to be able to reward them with a government contract or something to promote their private interest. I believe it's more so that we're merely going to advocate for an opinion that has no financial reward. At the end of it, it is merely more in the public interest.

That said, we'd feel like we would be covered by the legislation. We would register people as well. I think this is sort of one of those situations where the Caesar's wife rule applies, that for democracies to be credible, for things to run smoothly, it doesn't only have to be without evil, that it has to be – whatever that whole saying is. I've just lost my train of thought, and that often happens. I think everyone knows what I'm trying to get to.

The fact is that this system is fraught with difficulty, is fraught with situations which can come out. Let's face it. You spend \$40 billion of our money a year and you're consulting with many people who come in and give you advice and there are oftentimes situations where private interests could be very easily, I guess, pursued. Nonetheless, this would be a safeguard to that process albeit a minor implication on the ability to discuss with as many people maybe as we would like.

Thank you very much for the opportunity, again, to speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to make it very clear that I respect the hon. Minister of Education. I respect him in his position as the minister. I also respect his reputation as a lawyer. It is the high respect that I hold for my young colleague who drafted this amendment and my respect for lawyers in general that I appreciate . . .

An Hon. Member: Well, most lawyers.

Mr. Chase: Well, very specifically my son-in-law and my brother, but it extends beyond that to, you know, lawyers in general. If they don't follow through with their very high expectations, they're disbarred. So there is a process.

Where I get concerned: I know that the intent of Bill 2 was to cut through red tape. It was not to come down hard on community associations or individuals seeking to have a rink built in their area or a ball diamond upgraded or some type of community project. I think the line of demarcation or the line of separation is that influence peddling goes both ways, and when consultation turns into contracting, that is where the line is crossed.

I think that for MLAs to be able to report to the Ethics Commissioner in good faith, they need to signal from the very outset a meeting where the individual who is being consulted – it goes beyond information, and it goes into the possibility of having a government contract. If that is the case or if at some point later on that is a possibility, then I would think that from an ethics protection point of view an MLA would be well served to make note of those first contacts.

You know, I represent the University of Calgary, one of the powerhouses of information in this province, and I regularly approach a number of professors, most frequently, I would say, in the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy slash experiential learning because that is one of the areas where I am most in need of knowledge. But when I do go and ask someone about, for example, storing nonrenewable energy such as wind power and turning it into a form of compressed energy which can then later be drawn on for power, I'm not in a position, obviously, to award a contract.

Even if I were a government minister or an MLA on the government side, if I thought that my initial consultation and the advice I was given might lead me to offering a contract, then I would record that information because I'm operating on a public expectation. I've sworn an oath, and I've received my symbolic Mace, which indicates that I must be absolutely beholden to the laws of the land and representing my constituents in the most honest form, demonstrating the utmost of integrity.

Therefore, I cannot imagine, for my own protection as well as for the transparency and accountability of the process, not recording those types of meetings. The Minister of Education suggested that somehow this would add red tape. Well, I think we can very clearly define – and if it takes another amendment – where, as I said before, consultation turns into contract. Then the historical development of such a consultation or reverse lobbying needs to be recorded for the sake of transparency and accountability.

Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Do other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Now we're back to the bill. Are you ready for the question on the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Sorry. I'll stand up faster if necessary. I apologize, Mr. Chair, if you didn't see me.

The lobbyist registry has gone through a terrific amount of processing. It has gone through the standing policy committee procedures. We're approximately two years, I believe, from where we were when this was first introduced, and I very much appreciate the processing of this piece of legislation. The fact remains that there are large loopholes where the government has the potential of undue influence by not recording.

The government also has somewhat limited the powers of the Ethics Commissioner to regulate who it is that has been given either a salary or tremendous power. We've previously brought up the individual in charge of Stantec who is now serving on the super-board. Never were the individual's credentials questioned, but the fact that he is allowed, as just one of many examples, to maintain

shares in a company that does business with the government is a flaw that has yet to be addressed in this piece of legislation.

I would love to see the authority of the Ethics Commissioner tremendously increased, as I've stated numerous times, as well as that of the Ombudsman as well as that of the Auditor General. But this Lobbyists Act, while tremendously improved, still has about 25 per cent of the way to go before it can be considered transparent and accountable, and I appreciate having the opportunity in the Committee of the Whole to point that out.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce an amendment to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Do you have the amendment there with you?

Mr. Mason: I do.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause for a moment while it's distributed.

Okay, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move that we amend Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009. I will move on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 2 by striking out clause (b).

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll refer to this as amendment A2.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, I won't be long on this. I spoke originally – I believe it was at second reading – about the error that we felt was made when the government accepted a Liberal amendment which excluded spouses from the definition of associated persons. In our view, that was not the right approach to take because we think that it's very clear that a spousal relationship is a very close economic relationship, and it is impossible to separate the economic interests of two spouses. So if there is, in fact, a conflict for one, there is almost inevitably a conflict for the other.

I think that this will change that. What it will do is that if you go to section 2(b) on page 1 of the bill, currently 2(b) repeals subsection 5(a), and 5(a) reads that

for the purposes of this Act, a person is associated with a person or entity if that person or entity, as applicable, is

(a) the person's spouse or adult interdependent partner.

It's very clear to us, Mr. Chairman, that by accepting the Liberal amendment on this and passing it in the bill, the government created an enormous loophole that I think will haunt this bill for its entire legislative life or legal life. Our amendment will simply strike that clause out, and as such, a spouse or an interdependent partner will remain an associated person. I think it is almost self-evident that they are.

The arguments that were put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre at the time, as I recall, weighed very heavily on the equality in relationships, in modern relationships, and so on. I would submit that that is, in fact, a red herring, and that the real issue here is to make sure that there are no loopholes that would allow the circumvention of the intention of the lobbyist registry and very clear definitions of what people's interests are. With it as it

stands, that will not occur. I believe that the amendment is, in fact, critical to the success of the lobbyist registry moving forward and would urge members of the House to reconsider their position and vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: We're speaking to amendment A2. Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was intending is that we're all unique individuals, whether we're married or not, but the intention was not to take away the responsibility of individuals to be accountable. With our current expectations as MLAs we put before the Ethics Commissioner not only our holdings or our joint holdings, but we also put forward the holdings and the investments, et cetera, of our spouses. I think what needs to be recognized is that while we have independently defined lives and the right to have our own bank accounts, to have our own investments, each individual requires an accounting.

4:20

Whether that individual is an MLA or the spouse of an MLA or the spouse of a lobbyist, individuals have to be recognized as such. If there's a relationship associated by marriage or by common law or by somehow a business or familial connection, then the investments of the individual's connections also need to be recognized. I don't think that it's an either/or circumstance. I believe what we're trying to accomplish here is that every individual elected or family member or lobbyist or someone connected within their business or family needs to be accounted for in this lobbyist legislation.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hearing none, I'll call the question on amendment A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill. Are you ready for the question on Bill 2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Chase: Very quickly. We see this as an attempt to remove red tape to speed up the process to provide greater transparency and accountability and also to improve the business climate in which credit unions operate. For that reason we're supportive of it, just for the sake of having that recorded in *Hansard*.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anyone else wish to comment on the bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There were three questions from before. I would like to clarify them for the members opposite.

The Member for Calgary-Currie's question was: what would determine quorum? Quorum is set out in section 59 of the Credit Union Act as the lesser of 50 members or 10 per cent of the members entitled to vote at a meeting. That would entail the quorum. There was a question from the same member: does this open the door for problems with elections being seen as fair or unfair? That is not expected to. The members will determine whether or not advance polls can be used and how they are designed.

I'm not sure which member opposite asked on the reporting of committees: how will the reporting back to the credit union board be monitored to ensure that it happens? I think that was Calgary-Varsity's question. This will be monitored by the board, who will need the information to meet their responsibilities and for which some board members will sit on these committees. So there will be direct communication. The credit union's internal audit function and the external review by the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation will also be overseeing that.

One further question from the Member for Calgary-Varsity on his concern whether the forthwith comment needed to be replaced by a specific time. Credit unions are private companies, and their members vote for the board that represents them. Any mention of a time frame beyond that is normally regulated in financial institutions or any other entity. The use of the term "forthwith" gives the credit union the flexibility to set their own board governance but allows the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation to intervene if it could have the ability to impair the credit union operating properly.

I hope that clarifies the questions that were brought up by the members opposite, and I appreciate the opportunity to address those today. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I just wish to thank the hon. member for providing those clarifications. My questions were based on the fact that the majority of my working life, 34 years, has been in public service as opposed to private operations, and therefore I appreciate those clarifications. Thank you for providing them.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 8

Feeder Associations Guarantee Act

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have a series of questions. If these questions have been answered, you can just simply inform me, and I'll look for it in the previous *Hansard*, but these are the questions that we have been asked. With specific details about what guaranteed loans may be used for being moved into regulations with this proposed legislation, there are questions such as: does the government anticipate that loans will be guaranteed exclusively for the processing and marketing of livestock products? Previously it was only for purchasing, so those are two new elements that we'd appreciate answers for if it's possible.

Another question that has arisen is: what specific cases can the minister provide where it would be necessary to extend the loan guaranteeing to processing and marketing of livestock? As I say, initially these loans were just strictly for purchasing. Can the minister provide further clarification as to how members of feeder associations will benefit from these changes?

To the minister: would you prefer that I ask these questions individually so that you have a chance to respond? My intent is not to load you up. Sorry; I'm looking in the wrong direction. Shall I stop and let you answer those three questions now? Continue? Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to give you a fair opportunity.

Can the minister, then, provide further clarification as to how members of feeder associations will benefit from these changes? In earlier discussions we talked about the difference between cow-calf operations and feeder operations. What members of feeder associations will benefit most from these changes? Will it mostly benefit the larger scale operations? We're always concerned, as I'm sure government members are, about the family farm and the survival of smaller operations that have been in families for generations.

The last of these immediate sets of questions: has the minister or department done any studies to anticipate how these changes may increase the number of defaulted loans and the cost to government as a result of guaranteeing these loans? Earlier, when we were talking about Bill 8 in second reading, I brought up the example of Rancher's Beef and the fact that we were trying to support a made-in-Alberta processing solution. Unfortunately, the organization never received the amount of slaughter capacity that it was capable of, and it went out of business. The government had provided subsidies.

I will sit down and look forward to the answers to these questions. Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today to address some of the questions, particularly the ones that were raised during second reading of this bill. A few members of the House expressed some concerns and questions, and I appreciate having this opportunity now to provide some clarification and further details. With members' indulgence I'll review the questions they have now and get back with answers later on. As some of the comments and questions that were raised in second reading by different members were similar, I will attempt to address those in a more collective answer rather than point-by-point responses to members on particular issues. I'm confident that with further information and understanding there will be support for this legislation, which serves to strengthen our agricultural industry and by extension Alberta's rural communities and beyond.

The livestock and meat industry is a significant sector of our agricultural industry, and it makes an important contribution to our province's economy. Preliminary estimates show that livestock and livestock products in 2008 accounted for just over 42 per cent of

Alberta's farm cash receipts. Specifically, Mr. Chairman, cattle and calves were 30 per cent of farm cash receipts and estimated to have a value of just over \$3 billion; that's with a B. We're, in fact, the largest cattle-producing province in Canada, and nearly two-thirds of all Canadian beef processing occurs right here in the province of Alberta. Legislation and programs that support the growth of this commerce are, of course, of great value to all Albertans.

As shared in previous readings, Mr. Chairman, Bill 8 provides a rewriting of the existing act, and there has been debate over the merits and reasoning for that. To provide some context, the current act has been amended numerous times over the years, and the language used in that text is currently outdated. As the agricultural industry has changed and grown, many of the definitions and terminology used are now limited in their capacity to accurately describe or fully capture the scope of that business activity. Updated text will bring clarity. Since these wording improvements were needed throughout the act and its amendments, legal counsel advised that we create an entirely new document rather than adding further amendments. Simply put, it is more user or, honestly, reader friendly. Let me make it clear. The new act does not introduce wholesale changes, Mr. Chairman. The fundamental principles of the act remain the same.

Another question raised concerns about what is covered by legislation versus what is covered through regulation and if more jurisdiction is being given to regulation as opposed to legislation. That's not the intent here, Mr. Chairman. In fact, the only thing being moved from the existing act to regulations is the activity for which the loan may be given. Originally the act specifically limited the program to the acquisition of livestock for growing or finishing or both by the members of a feeder association. However, as the scope of activity of feeder association members extends further into the value chain, we require legislation and regulations that reflect that extended role.

Given the rapid pace of change in the industry, Mr. Chairman, we have anticipated that we may need to update the description again in the near future. Moving the description of that activity from legislation to regulation will allow this change in a more flexible and timely manner without having to reopen the act. With the new definition of feeder association, which includes the words "otherwise deal with," the proposed act will allow regulation to specify that activity, ensuring a more current and accurate reflection of it.

On the same subject of legislation versus regulation we did in fact move one item from regulation directly into the new act itself. The requirement for a security deposit would be entrenched in the legislation, ensuring that that element of risk mitigation protection is always part of the program.

I also want to stress that as in all legislation, regulation does have an important role to play and is not something deliberately subversive. Defining and detailing all things in legislation is just not feasible or realistic or effective or allowing flexibility. The process of developing regulation is absolutely nothing new in any government.

There was also some discussion in the last reading about whether this new act is transparent and accountable. We have added section 9, which clearly articulates the powers of the minister versus the rights of individuals or businesses. This demonstrates transparency and accountability, Mr. Chairman.

Also, let me state that the new act does not change the way these loan guarantees are granted by the government in any way, shape, or form. The criteria for guaranteeing a loan to a feeder association were never written in the act before. The process for this activity remains at the regulation and policy level, with the ministers responsible – both finance and agriculture are responsible – continuing to be involved in the order in council process.

To answer the question of why we have removed the requirement to renew the act every five years, which was brought up in second reading, commonly referred to, Mr. Chairman, as the sunset clause, and the inference that this somehow means less accountability, it changes nothing about a very solid accountability of the program. Government remains responsible for ensuring that the established policies and procedures are followed. What is accomplished by removing the renewal requirement is that it strengthens the program and the security that the program will exist.

The need to renew the act has the effect of creating a degree of uncertainty among lenders and the associations themselves. Indeed, every five years when this issue came up, I got a record number of calls to my constituency office asking if we were going to get rid of the feeder association program. That's undesirable for an industry that we are trying to grow and advance. If we have learned anything from the current global economic situation, it should be that stability is critical to the financial world. Certainty is critical to the business world and those who depend on it.

In terms of who this program benefits, Mr. Chairman, there was some question of how it relates to cow-calf producers. I want to point out that the program has been serving these members in the industry for years. It has allowed these producers to effectively retain control of their calf crop for an additional 12 months. This allows them to get needed cash flow in the fall and still add value to the weaned calf by feeding home-ground feeds. The program will continue to serve cow-calf producers in this way. Nothing is changing about that. The program also supports these producers by providing a market for their calves and a link in the supply chain to the larger finishing lots.

As for who qualifies as members of a feeder association, the new regulation will establish criteria for associations to use when considering membership; however, it will be the feeder associations themselves, not government, who makes those specific decisions, and rightly so.

In response to the question of whether the proposed act focuses on processing and marketing of livestock products and not just purchasing: not at all. The program will continue to play a role in providing capital to purchase cattle. However, it will now extend to processing and marketing, allowing producers to further participate in the supply chain, giving them more power over their finished product, and adding more value to the product they grow themselves. Those who want to retain ownership of the product through to the meat retail stage will have that ability under the expanded program.

Let me provide an example of why this is desirable. Producers who are differentiating their product with special attributes such as organic production practices and so on need to create a continuous link to their customers in order to capture the higher value. Having to pay off a feeder association loan before they have sold their inventory would be an undue financial hardship and, indeed, keep them from entering themselves farther up the value chain.

Let's be really clear. Businesses that only process and market meat products would not – not – be eligible for this program, nor would the loan guarantee be transferred from one business to the next as the livestock moves through the process from cattle to meat product.

One member of this House raised the concern that the new act would allow corporations to be members of feeder associations, extending support to large operations, which would give them an advantage over smaller ones. Certainly, as with many businesses there are benefits to economies of scale; however, if the concern is for what we like to call the family farm, let me point out that a significant number of family farms are now incorporated and have grown substantially in size.

An Hon. Member: So they're not family.

4:40

Mr. Griffiths: But they're still owned by family members, and the majority of family farms now are incorporated.

It's really an emotional argument that has nothing to do with reality. Members who made these arguments should perhaps leave the city once in a while. The program simply reflects the current business model that a large number of producers have chosen, and in fact my own family and our farm chose it in 1972. [interjection] Pardon?

The Deputy Chair: Just looking at your tie. That's okay.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah, I know I have pigs on my tie. Thank you for pointing that out, Mr. Chairman. It's an agriculture tie.

Another area of concern raised in the previous debate was whether this program and the proposed legislative or regulatory changes present a high or a higher risk to the viability of these feeder associations. Let me state for the record that this has been a highly successful program. Over the life of the program the payouts under the guarantee have amounted to only 0.06 per cent – that's 0.06 per cent – of the amount of financing provided to the industry. That is less than one-tenth of 1 per cent, an incredible success story. None of the changes proposed have any effect on that. In addition, it should be understood that there are very effective risk mitigation practices in place with this program that the feeder associations utilize.

We have done our due diligence in recognizing that we will need to adapt the mitigation procedures to be appropriately applied to any program changes, such as how they apply to corporations. As another example, feeder association members choosing to participate in the equity draw options to be defined in the regulations will be expected to use some sort of price protection mechanism to ensure that the value of the livestock is ultimately realized at the time of sale.

The cattle price insurance program, or CPIP for short, being developed by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation would be one such mechanism. As far as the liability of the program as a whole, the current maximum is set at \$55 million, and there is no desire or need to increase this amount of the guarantee at this time.

Overall I would say that Alberta's tax dollars are well applied and protected under this program, and it does wonders for the beef industry.

As you know, Alberta's agricultural industry is export oriented, so we highly value our trade relationships and work to ensure that those remain on a good footing. There was a question of whether this program puts our trade relationships at risk of retaliatory action. First, there is no subsidy of interest rates under this program. Feeder associations get their financing from commercial financial institutions at negotiated rates. Also, it's worth noting that this program was included as part of a very thorough review of our beef cattle programs by the U.S. department of industry, trade, and commerce in 1998 and 1999. They deemed that it was not significant enough to be of any concern to them at this time.

To sum up, as I stated earlier, the agricultural industry makes an important contribution to our economy and our rural communities. This particular legislation and program is an appropriate support to the economic development of the province. The program has been in effect in one form or another since 1936 and has been an effective catalyst for growth. The legislation and program simply lays the foundation, Mr. Chairman, and creates a stable environment for feeder associations and financial institutions to develop a solid business relationship. They are the business units involved, not the

government. Government's role is limited to providing the loan guarantees and responsible and effective oversights such as audits and inspection services to make sure that everything is working effectively.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, I would stress that they have a very strong foundation for this program. The new act will add clarity to the legislation, enable improved and new regulations that support program enhancements. Therefore, I encourage all member of the House to support Bill 8 through Committee of the Whole and at third reading, where I would be happy to answer any further questions that come out of Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the clarifying answers provided from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Let's get it officially. [interjections] Battle River-Wainwright. Sorry, I was bringing you a little closer to the Legislature. Thank you for that clarification. Among the clarifications I'm very appreciative that you addressed my concern about perceived subsidies and specifically the concerns that R-CALF or sort of territorial types down in the States might put forward.

I had an opportunity the week previous to talk with a rancher from Montana. I jokingly asked him if he was a member of the R-CALF group. While he didn't mention that, we talked to the degree that I was capable about some of the problems associated with animals crossing the border. He was saying that he ships quite a few animals north and has to go through lengthy processing experiences in trying to ship his cattle. So I'm quite sure that there is equal frustration with ours going south.

I also appreciate the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright pointing out about the need for city folks to get out into the country. Just very briefly I want to say that I did just that this past weekend. My wife and I went out to East Coulee for a music festival, that we thoroughly enjoyed. While we were there, we ran into a former Liberal candidate in the Drumheller-Stettler area, Tom Dooley, and his wife, who are both cattle producers. I'm sure they're members of the feeder group. What was interesting to me was that again my knowledge of agriculture increased tremendously.

Tom and his wife had just purchased a number of calves that had recently been weaned. The reason he did not buy them from the surrounding neighbourhood and bought them instead from a small district around Dorothy was the fact that both the mothers and the calves would be trying to get back together, and the disruption on the animals themselves, both the cows and the calves, would be such as to cause stress to the livestock. So he's having his shipped in from a greater distance so as to avoid that breakup of the family, so to speak, which is obviously part of the agricultural operation.

I thank you very much. With each sortie into the country I'm getting a better understanding. I also appreciate in your clarifications that the loans are secured, that they're guaranteed, because that was a concern we had.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any further comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for a bit of clarification from the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. You know, I know I've been here only a short time. I'm going to try at some point in time to get a handle on all the agricultural acts and symposiums and whatever and different

programs and all that stuff that exists in this Legislature. At this time I must confess I'm having difficulties with it because I had no idea of the breadth and width and involvement of our government activities into the lives of, I guess, our farmers and our ranchers and the like.

Nonetheless, I'm glad to see that this program is one of those ones that looks like it's necessary. Maybe some of the other ones aren't. Maybe some of the other ones have to be curtailed at some time; I don't know. Nonetheless, at some point in time I hope to have a comment to be a little more ingrained and knowledgeable. I may actually even undertake to do that this summer, maybe even with the help of the hon. agriculture minister's campaign manager. I ran into him at The Metropolitan Grill last Friday night, and he offered to explain it to me sometime. Maybe I will take him up on that. I look forward to that opportunity at some time.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and the explanation.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?
Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 8?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

4:50

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 18, Bill 2, Bill 3, and Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 2, Bill 3, and Bill 8. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
Hon. members, before we proceed with Bill 1, may I have unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of Employment and Immigration's policy team who worked tirelessly on the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 1 is close to completing its way through the legislative process. There have been many outstanding comments from both sides of the Assembly. I think it's only appropriate that Tim Thompson, Sandra Wagenseil, and Myles Morris are here to witness their hard work become law that will in turn benefit the thousands of Alberta reservists who serve our country. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and our thank you for the work that you have done on Bill 1.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. the Premier.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

This amendment provides Canadian Forces reservists in Alberta with unpaid, job-protected leave while they're away from their civilian jobs serving our country. The amendment also provides the reservist with an additional 20 days' leave to take part in annual training.

Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the support of members on both sides of this Assembly, and I thank all members for their thoughtful comments and discussion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly in third on this legislation, which is very important to me. Very quickly, the fact that I'm here at all is subject to very much good fortune. My grandfather was a British cavalry officer in the First World War and was gassed at Ypres, and the fact that he made it through was a testimony to not only his abilities but those of the unit that he was assigned to. Also, my father was a pilot during the Second World War, and in part of his instruction circumstance his plane crashed, and he was pulled out seconds before the fuel tanks ignited. Again, with very good fortune and the quick act of the ground crew he was pulled to safety and he recuperated. He re-enlisted after the Second World War, so I grew up either on or very near bases for a large part of my life.

While reservists don't have the opportunity to live on base – obviously, they do some of their training on bases – the job that they do, the sacrifices they make are as equally important as those of the regular services. Recognizing them through the protection of their employment and recognizing their need to receive the training that will not only provide them with the tools that they need but allow them to be effective members of overseas action, whether it's peacekeeping or in a war circumstance, is absolutely essential.

One of the areas that I hope this bill also covers is a type of compensation for the employer who is required by this law to hold the position. Hopefully within the bill there is some accommodation

for the employer's recognizing the importance and worth of their employee.

The 20-day allowance for training is extremely important. I know, as I say, being the son of a military officer, how wearing the experience was for my mother when my dad would be away on coursework, and that is nothing in comparison to the angst associated with a person being on the front lines. So it would be my hope that future bills will extend further to make sure that the spouse of a reservist and the families of reservists are supported.

When we lived on the base, that support was easier because, for example, when we were stationed at Namao, there was shopping, there was entertainment, there were a variety of circumstances on the base to support the spouses. But in the case of reservists they're obviously not living on the base, and sometimes a reservist's family can be somewhat isolated. Living off the base, their neighbours may not realize the magnitude of the sacrifice they are making. I would hope, as I say, that in future legislation as well as honouring the job that reservists do, we take into account the effect it has on their families when they're away and provide support for them, whether it be in respite care for the spouses or membership in community associations or access, as a number of regular forces personnel have, to special discounts for recreational activities. I would like to think that the privileges that the community and the government provide for members of the regular forces be extended to the greatest extent possible to reservists.

Reservists, as I say, while they've taken a great amount of personal time off to do the training, where that training sort of meets the mat or is undertaken is when the bullets are flying on a mission outside of Kandahar or, formerly, in Cyprus and a number of areas where brave Canadian men and women have represented this country.

Beyond a doubt, I and my Liberal colleagues support this legislation. I appreciate the government members for bringing it forward. As the son of a long line of militarily involved family members I say: well done.

Thank you.

5:00

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although this bill now is in third reading, I have not had an opportunity to speak to it, but I, too, will be brief. Although not to the extent of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity my family, too, has a bit of a military history. My grandfather was 37 years old when World War II broke out, not exactly a young man; however, he did enlist in the army. He served as a cobbler in, of all places, Halifax. He made shoes for four years. When he came back from war, he brought a nice little bag home, and that was my first hockey bag that I took to hockey when I was seven years old. It said C. Hehr on it with a little army number and all that stuff. It was a neat little memento I got from World War II. As my grandfather's experience was as a cobbler, I'm sure that possibly the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's father wore some of the shoes that my grandfather was busy making in Halifax.

But to the merits of the bill. This is essentially something that is well received by both our side of the House and the government side. It's clearly something that's long past due as many other jurisdictions, in fact maybe all other jurisdictions, have already passed this type of job protection for reservists. We all know, as has probably been belaboured in this House, that Alberta's 2,500 reservists are doing us proud both as Alberta citizens and Canadian citizens at the same time. It's the least we can do as a community to

recognize their sacrifice and allow for them to have their employment opportunities back when they return from duty.

On that note, I will leave it for others if they wish to partake in the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 15

Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to move third reading of Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the act arises out of requirements in sections 9 and 10 of our own Hydro and Electric Energy Act. The passage of this bill would allow the Alberta Utilities Commission to issue authorization to construct the facility on the Peace River. It would also allow the AUC to authorize operation of the facility at the appropriate time. The bill does not in any way infringe upon the normal regulatory authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be very quick because the Liberal caucus is very supportive of renewable energy which does not leave a dramatic footprint, and run of the river is one such form of energy. Dams aren't required. The movement of fish and, basically, animal crossings are accounted for in the way the run of the river is set up. It fits very much into our philosophy that we need to diversify not only our economy but our various sources of power, and bringing on safe renewables such as run of the river is one of those ways.

I also want to commend the government on removing the cap within the last two years on wind generation and also encouraging a variety of organizations, both industrial in terms of large senses, like in the oil sands, but also on farms, in providing cogeneration and creative ways of using animal waste to create methane, with the potential of not only using the power provided by the methane on the farm but also the potential of exporting this power to the grid.

In terms of having received a greater understanding of the information, I think most Albertans when they hear the name Brian Keating will associate it with his outreach on behalf of the Calgary Zoo. I had a chance to teach two of the family members of his brother John Keating. John Keating has been involved in numerous renewable power projects. It was basically at a parent-teacher interview where I cornered John and asked him about types of renewable power. He was a big supporter of the idea of renewable power and the river run being a part of it.

I very much appreciate the hon. Member for Peace River bringing forward this legislation. It indicates a desire by this government to diversify its energy sources along with the expenditure on the CO₂ sequestration, to have a much greener approach and more renewable, practical approach to providing energy for this province. Therefore, I want to again thank the government member for bringing this forward. It is progressive. It is maybe one more step towards our greening of our energy requirements.

As the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, has pointed out, we will continue to rely on and be grateful for the power generated from nonrenewable resources, whether it's conventional oil and gas or the more unconventional types such as the operation, bitumen collection, in the oil sands and also the other forms of power that are being generated.

We would advise a very careful, measured, well-informed approach as the government considers other forms of energy, and of those other forms we would hope that the greatest of consultation, the greatest of information gathering, and scientific reviews would be considered before going down the line toward nuclear energy. This is one of the most controversial types of energy and, unlike the river run, has both strengths and weaknesses that have to be considered in thorough debate.

I again thank the minister from Athabasca-Peace for bringing forward this piece of legislation. [interjection] Sorry. I expanded your territory. Sorry about that.

Mr. Oberle: And raised my title while you're at it.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you. I'm sorry that we can't provide you a bonus for extending that area, but you've done a good job so far. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Do you wish to close, hon. member?

Mr. Oberle: Just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

5:10

Bill 5
Marketing of Agricultural Products
Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and move third reading of Bill 5, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. The proposed amendments are a result of a review of the existing legislation and industry consultations. In 2006 the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council began an industry governance review, including a review of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. Consultations included the 20 agricultural boards and commissions, a survey of producers who are not actively engaged in industry organizations, and meeting with other agricultural organizations in Alberta and, indeed, across Canada. Over 400 individuals participated in the consultation process, Mr. Speaker.

No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987, so the proposed legislation will update the act, simplify the wording, eliminate duplication, and make minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulations. I think we had a good discussion on this in the Committee of Supply.

In conclusion, these amendments will allow the current act to better serve the needs of our agriculture marketing boards and commissions.

I appreciate the support of the hon. members from both sides of the House and anticipate their continued support with third reading of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Today is very much a sort of a home, home on the range type of corraling of bills.

I very much appreciate the hon. minister of agriculture's consultation, having reached out to Albertans who are most affected, having brought the clarification into this bill, basically cutting through a whole lot of bureaucracy and red tape, bringing it up to its current expedient attempt.

The reality is that agriculture was the first strong pillar upon which this province was founded, and it continues to be a very strong pillar, particularly in these times of global recession, when outside forces determine the value of our nonrenewable resources, our oil and gas. Agriculture to a large extent is determined by global markets, but there is less of a fluctuation; there is greater stability within agriculture. There is an adaptability that is part of both farming and ranching where if necessary you change the type of animal or, in the farming case, you change your approach, whether it be to go more organic and use less fertilizer, all the different types of tilling. So the marketing of agricultural products is one of the ways this province is going to climb out of the recessionary hole that we're currently faced with.

I appreciate the minister of agriculture bringing forth this bill, which will strengthen not only agriculture in this province but our economy. Thank you for doing so.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. minister to close debate?

Mr. Groeneveld: Closed.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 4
Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Ms Notley]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to get up and speak to this bill, given that it allows for many of our postsecondary institutions, such as Mount Royal College in Calgary and some other institutions up here in Edmonton, the opportunity of moving into the university stream. I think that in the future allowing this stream to exist will enable more Albertans to become graduates of universities and of university level programs to obtain the knowledge that's going to be necessary to propel Alberta and its citizens into the 21st century to be able to truly compete in the knowledge-based economy. This process will allow us to continue to do that.

I would also encourage us to look at not only making some of this existing college and university space available for this stuff. We should be really looking down the future at opportunities where we can add more university space, more college and postsecondary education space throughout the province.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I've just noticed that you've already spoken in second reading.

Mr. Hehr: My goodness. My most humble apologies. We can move on.

The Acting Speaker: You have as well, Calgary-Varsity.
Does any member wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 6
Protection of Children Abusing Drugs
Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Hancock]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to stand and speak to Bill 6, which is the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, which is a good act that I plan, I believe, on supporting. I just have a few questions and concerns with the existing parameters.

If we look at the bill in total, it's really providing parents with children who are thought to have a difficulty with drugs an opportunity where they can confine those children for up to 10 days. The amendment actually proposes increasing the length of confinement, that was previously five days, to 10 days. Primarily, this is in regard to the more difficult nature of drug abuse, a recognition that many of the drugs out there now that are available to people who are under the age of 18 are much more potent and can cause significant physical addiction to this drug that lasts longer than five days. The 10-day window I believe is fair and reasonable for parents with children who are suffering from these addictions to put them in a confined setting to try and battle their demons and get a handle on at least the physical addiction so that when they leave the facility in 10 days, they have an opportunity to go out into the world and face it with a clear mind and decide whether following that lifestyle is, indeed, in their best interests or if they maybe want a clean break and to pursue longer range solutions.

5:20

There's also the possibility of adding another five days. At that point what this amendment I believe is seeking is that it would allow for a continued confinement of up to 10 days, but it would go before a judge, and it would give the judge the ability to extend the period for a further five days if the original time for a minor wasn't long enough to detox. In general I am in favour of this change. Of course, I would wait to hear how the Child and Youth Advocate will be involved and maybe some opportunities for individuals to seek some legal counselling to see if it is in their ability to get themselves out of this situation should it be necessary and give them an opportunity to be heard in a court of law. Those things I would be interested in hearing more about at the committee stage and at third before I render my final decision.

Nevertheless, I believe this bill recognizes that our best opportunity to deal with the addiction problems that are beginning to emerge not only in Alberta but in other areas of North America and, indeed, the world happen when they're young. The best time to fight these things is when individuals are young and when they are in the custody and care of their parents and when their parents are actively involved in their lives and really wish to help their children rid themselves of the addictive process.

I believe that this bill, at least at first glance, has some tremendous attributes that will enable some children and some parents some opportunities to get off drugs, to maybe rectify their lives and go forward. When those questions are answered and when I hear further debate on this, I imagine myself being supportive of these amendments.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 6 here today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes for anyone wishing to comment or question.

Seeing none, do any other members wish to join debate?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what has been said as I've listened intently to the debate on Bill 6 and will be prepared to answer some of the questions when we get into committee.

At this point I'd like to move second reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 7
Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 17: Dr. Swann]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. A large part of Bill 7 has to do with clarifying where we are with regard to the delivery of services. The point of the bill will be to strengthen the role of the chief medical officer of health, support student public health programs, expand the reporting of public health matters, and transfer some of the regulations that were formerly under the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister. That is where we have a degree of concern, and that concern will be discussed in much greater detail when we come to Bill 52.

What has happened is that while we support whatever we can do to increase the efficiency of our delivery of universal public health services, the accountability portion is always of concern. We've gone from consolidation of regional health authorities to a smaller group. We went from 17, I believe, to 9, and now we've arrived at a superboard with a health board chairperson, who comes highly recommended – I have heard this – from Australia. That gives me hope because in Australia he has seen a number of private P3-type operations fail and actually be recovered within the public system. So I think the individual from Australia was a wise choice, and I commend the minister and the members of the superboard for coming up with that individual. I know it was a very extensive interviewing process, and I'm remaining optimistic that this is one of the individuals who has the background that can bring and strengthen our universal public health system.

One of the concerns that I have brought up before and that occurs, if not on a daily basis, certainly on a weekly basis within my constituency is who you're going to report to. When a constituent comes to me with regard to a health-related problem and access to the health system or support from the government for a malady, be it gastroparesis, which I have brought up prior, or whether it be receiving a particular type of cancer treatment which involves chemical combinations which have been approved for other types of cancer fighting within the province but not necessarily in the chemical combination, I used to be able to address my concerns to a lady whose name, I believe, was Lynn Redford.

Mr. Liepert: You still can.

Mr. Chase: I'm pleased to hear from the minister that that local autonomy still exists because this was one of my concerns. Possibly

the minister can pass on the name of the most recent contact so that I can inform my constituents. I'm pleased to hear that local authority and local autonomy. . .

Mr. Liepert: Same one. Same one.

Mr. Chase: Oh. Okay. I'd heard that Lynn's position had changed, so I'm glad to hear that in this particular, limited experience I am wrong. I appreciate the hon. minister recognizing the talents of this lady. She is an absolutely wonderful front-line individual. We could call and within two hours we would get directed.

Mr. Liepert: Good blood lines from the Attorney General.

Mr. Chase: Oh, is that right? I hadn't realized. That goes to testify to the great quality of the blood lines that are there.

The concern, as I say – and I appreciate the minister for correcting my concern here or redirecting it. There are a number of groups like, for example, Rick Lundy, who is working on advocating for patients who have suffered difficulties in the medical system. It's on record the difficulties his wife had and the embarrassment associated with a miscarriage and not being able to be admitted to a room. The notion of the control – who do you go to, and how quickly will you get a response? – the local autonomy versus the overriding powers of the health board: hopefully, in debate over Bill 7 the minister will provide greater clarification, and in so doing, will alleviate some of the fears of individuals who have experienced ever-increasing waits in waiting rooms and at emergency.

5:30

Also, hopefully, as the minister provides greater information on Bill 7 and the way the health board will be administering, individuals involved in the various levels, paramedics and health professionals, will receive a greater sense of security. Right now there is such a flux that people are concerned not only for their own jobs within the health care system, which is a major employer in Alberta and, obviously, our most costly ministry, but we have not seen overall perceivable improvements within the system. For example, while 60 per cent of seniors have benefited from reduced costs in pharmaceuticals, it appears that the 40 per cent of seniors who haven't benefited have basically had their Blue Cross rates doubled so that any advantage that they receive from health premiums being removed has now been experienced as an increase in their pharmaceuticals.

I'll not get into the concerns over the transfer of the health records. That will come up in Bill 52. But suffice it to say that there is great concern both in the medical community and from a patient-client perception that the records might be subject to external scrutiny.

However, I look forward to the minister attempting to explain to me, as he did in the case of Lynn Redford, any other efficiencies and autonomies local authorities have kept. We may not have health regions, but according to the minister, we still have regional responsiveness. So I would look forward to the minister providing more information, and if not in this second reading stage, then providing those assurances during the Committee of the Whole stage. I do appreciate the information he provided so quickly, which did offer me a degree of reassurance.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Hearing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close debate?

Mr. Liepert: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 9

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Hancock]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm sorry. I was just collaborating with my hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. If I could please be updated, I apologize for not being totally attentive to where we're at.

An Hon. Member: Bill 9.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you. I do have comments that I would like to make with regard to Bill 9 if I may be permitted to do so. Thank you for that opportunity.

I've been quite collaborative this afternoon, and I have agreed with a number of bills. In general I agree with what is being intended within this bill, but I must take a small shot at the fact that it's called the Government Organization Amendment Act. By putting the words "government" and "organization" together, it comes across to me as a bit of a paradoxical oxymoron.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, like Liberal appeal.

Mr. Chase: Well, another example of an oxymoron if we're going to exchange is Progressive Conservative – okay? – if we're going to get into wordsmithing.

Mr. Hancock: It's totally unparliamentary to call me an oxymoron.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor and will address the chair.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Who is definitely neither an ox nor a moron although we have spent a lot of time talking about beef today – okay? – related to the ox family. I just want to draw that connection.

In terms of Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, in this year 2009 one of the biggest improvements this government made in terms of its organization or reorganization is getting rid of the ministry whose acronym was RAGE, which was restructuring and government efficiency. I give the government full credit for getting rid of that ministry and returning to the various ministries the ability to conduct their own business without having a sort of overseer ministry.

This act basically brings greater efficiency into the organization of government. The intention is to get rid of red tape to improve the delivery of service to Albertans. Given these recessionary times improved organization and accountability should be praised at all levels. At this point, without belabouring it, I am supportive. So we don't miss my colleague through further discussions, I would indicate to the chair his desire to participate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak on Bill 9, Government Organization Amend-

ment Act, 2009. I, too, would like to say that this looks like a good bill that will increase the accountability of our registering agencies. I think that's a good thing. For one, in their privatization in 1993 these agencies took over a great many things: the licensing of vehicles, the handing out of drivers' licences. Not only do these agencies give this stuff out, but they also hold a great deal of private, sensitive information in their databases and have access to all sorts of things. Of course, when you have the ability to issue a legal document such as a driver's licence, there's often some temptation for individuals to try and produce those documents or for people to try and get them. I think having this type of increased government oversight over our registry agents is an important step. It increases the accountability in the process and can sort of keep an eye on some of the things that maybe were creeping up in the system.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to that bill. On that, we can go forward.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is also available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

5:40

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

[Adjourned debate March 11: Ms Pastoor]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just to provide a bit of a preview as part of the tracking of the process and to assure the hon. House leader, I will be speaking to this very briefly, as will my colleagues from Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-McCall, and the last speaker will be calling for adjournment. Thank you.

What Bill 10 purports to accomplish is the licensing and monitoring grounds for the government over supportive living facilities. The bill outlines what this legislation applies to as regards facilities. A framework is given for inspections, investigations, complaints, and offences, which is very much appreciated. What creates a degree of burden and hopefully will be addressed through amendments is the leeway left to regulation regarding what is exempt from the application of this act. There are issues concerning how a

complaints officer may dismiss a complaint. However, I believe that the intention behind the bill is good, and I think with just a little bit of collaborative effort we can accomplish what the bill intends to do.

As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has pointed out, we have a variety of different types of accommodations. We have long-term care, we have assisted living, and we have supportive living, and when working well together, they all provide homes where accredited support is provided to individuals whether they be by age placed into these institutions, whether by some addiction or behavioural difficulty in the case of group homes for youth. Also, individuals with physical or developmental disabilities find themselves in a supportive living circumstance.

It is somewhat unfortunate within this province that we have so few accessible home environments so that individuals would not have to necessarily be moved into supportive living accommodations, but time and necessity require it. As a result, it's important that these facilities be regulated. This is what, again, Bill 10 intends to accomplish.

I very much appreciate the work that was done by the member from Ponoka and also the Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe it was – I may be wrong – who worked in conjunction with the Member for Lethbridge-East on long-term care. They toured the province after the Auditor General had pointed out some of the deficiencies of long-term care, and they made numerous recommendations, some of which have been implemented.

So I see Bill 10 doing for supportive living what previous legislation and Auditor General assessments have done for long-term care. Rather than cause confusion for the House leader, if it is all right with the House leader, I would move to adjourn debate at this time. I did not want to pre-empt speakers on his side.

Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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