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The 27th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the procession was led today for the last time by Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms Ed Richard. Mr. Richard will be retiring following this session. Prior to serving the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Richard spent 32 years with the Edmonton Police Service. Upon his retirement as staff sergeant in 1997 he joined the Legislative Assembly security service. In November of 1999 he was appointed to the position of Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms. On behalf of all members I would like to express appreciation for Mr. Richard's committed service to this House and wish him the very best in his retirement.

Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are many of Ed's family and friends, including his wife of 41 years, Jane Richard, his children, and five of his seven grandchildren. I would now ask all of them to rise, including the distinguished Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms, to receive once again the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation] Hon. members, that was a very, very nice acknowledgement of Mr. Richard's very dedicated service. Thank you.

Also in the Speaker's gallery today is a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, the former Member for Edmonton-Manning, who served in the 26th Legislature, Mr. Dan Backs. We ask him to rise.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 80 visitors to both galleries. These are visitors from Muriel Martin school in St. Albert. They are a hugely curious group of young people who certainly have assured the future of our province. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Jody Bialowas, Mrs. Katie Boyd, Mr. Rick Lof, Mlle Danielle Jean; parent helpers Mrs. Michelle Borrett, Mrs. Leanne Svenson, Mr. Bill Nelson, Mme Yolande Pejot, Mrs. Debbie Anderson, and Mrs. Tana Farrell. I believe, as I said, they're in both galleries. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislature.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members 49 very distinguished students from Keheewin elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. I believe they are also seated in both the members' and public galleries. They are accompanied

today by teachers Mrs. Renie Wolodko, Mr. Mark Leenders, Miss Mona Kamar and by parents Mrs. Lisa Severin, Ms Cheryl Harts-horne, and Mrs. Christa Winters. I'd ask the students to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Berger:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fine group of southern Albertans. They are here today to show their overwhelming support for the future Alberta police and peace officer training college at Fort Macleod and to attend a meeting arranged at my request with the Solicitor General and Finance minister.

This project is of great significance to southern Alberta as you will see by the group of esteemed individuals I'm about to introduce. I would now ask them to rise as I call their names: Mayor Shawn Patience, Fort Macleod; Sharon Monical, Christine Trowbridge, Brian Reach, and Gord Wolstenholme, councillors for the town of Fort Macleod. Gord's father, George Wolstenholme, was an MLA here for the constituency of Highwood from 1975 to 1982. Also, we have Jordan No Chief, councillor of Piikani Nation; Mayor Rob Steel, town of Claresholm; Mayor John Irwin, Crownsnest Pass; Mayor Barry Johnson, town of Stavely; Mayor Melva Stinson, town of Granum; Mayor Dennis Cassie, Coalhurst; Henry Van Hierden, reeve of the MD of Willow Creek; and support staff Barry Elliott, Fort Macleod, and Martin Ebel, economic development, Fort Macleod. Also in the gallery we have Tracy Edwards, president of Lethbridge Community College. I think I have them all. Please give them the resounding welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Edmonton's own Juventus U14 soccer team, who recently won the Canadian national championships for U14 boys' soccer. Congratulations to the players and coaches Kurt Bosch, Rob Mosele, Tony Mayall, and Richard Harris on this tremendous accomplishment. As a former coach for the Juventus Soccer Club I know first-hand how much time and hard work goes into coaching. Your dedication to these kids is greatly appreciated, and it is nice to see that hard work being paid off with the national championships. We have parents and other coaches in both galleries. I'd ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you today and through you to all members of the Assembly two people who are very important, integral, in fact, to the operations of HIV Edmonton. They, of course, are responsible for the cards and the red AIDS ribbons that you received on your desks today. I would ask James Mabey to please rise. James is one of our emerging leaders, our up-and-comers in Edmonton, and was recognized as one of the Top 40 under 40. He's the vice-chair of HIV Edmonton. With him today is John Gee. John Gee will be a familiar face to this Assembly because for a number of years he supported my predecessor, Michael Henry, running the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. John has given a great deal of time as a volunteer and as a staff member for various inner-city agencies and is currently the operations co-ordinator for HIV Edmonton. Please welcome these two gentlemen to the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Drysdale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an outstanding Albertan from the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency, Mr. Andre Harpe. Andre is very active in the constituency and has served on several community and provincial boards. We had a full house today, so I hope Mr. Harpe is seated in the members' gallery. I can't see him behind me, but I would ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jiravej Sireelert, a grade 11 exchange student from Chang Mai in Thailand. Jiravej, also known here as Kevin, is currently attending Archbishop MacDonal high school and was sponsored as a Rotary exchange student by the Rotary Club in Thailand and is being hosted by the Rotary Club of Edmonton Northeast. Jiravej is spending an entire year here in Canada as part of the Rotary exchange program, and he's accompanied today by a member of the hosting Rotary Club, Karin Olson, who also is my wife. I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the public gallery, rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

**1:40**

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly members from the Camrose green energy action team. The team members take a political action approach to sustainable energy issues. The group collected signatures on a petition, which I will be tabling later today, asking this Assembly to reject nuclear power in this province. I would now ask that my guests, Denise Dufresne and Ellen Parker, who are seated in the public gallery, rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Climate Change

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are all aware, there is a significant climate change milestone approaching. Alberta will be part of the Canadian delegation attending the December climate change summit in Copenhagen. This is an important opportunity for Alberta to share its perspective on reducing emissions while maintaining a strong economy. It is a time to share details about our ongoing work to address climate change and our renewed commitments moving forward.

Alberta continues to take action now to reduce greenhouse gases while planning for a clean energy future. We are a global energy supplier with a commitment to responsible development.

Alberta's most well-known investment is our unprecedented \$2 billion commitment to carbon capture and storage, but this is only part of the picture. Another example is Alberta's Ecotrust projects. Alberta's Ecotrust projects are technology-based projects that tackle climate change and clean air. We have already announced two Ecotrust projects. On October 1 the province distributed \$7.45 million so that waste energy from Edmonton could be transferred to

1,600 homes in Strathcona county. On October 14 I had the tremendous pleasure of announcing a second Ecotrust investment of \$20 million to support the creation of the Drayton Valley Energy Campus.

These are innovative projects that will help move Alberta towards a clean energy future, and I'm excited to say that there are more Ecotrust grant announcements yet to come. Mr. Speaker, significant progress can be made and will be made in tackling climate change through deliberate, meaningful, and ongoing investments.

Thank you.

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

#### AIDS Awareness

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. AIDS Awareness Week started November 23 and culminates on December 1, World AIDS Day. In honour of this and with the kind permission and assistance of the Speaker you have each received a red ribbon symbolizing the fight against AIDS. Please wear it to signal your support of the campaign to increase awareness, provide support and help, and advocate for those living with AIDS. On the same card is the pin for HIV Edmonton, which is embarking on a campaign to celebrate 25 years since its inception in 1984.

Last week I attended a wonderful event honouring Edmonton's Michael Phair and the few individuals who gathered around his kitchen table to develop a plan to deal with the arrival in Edmonton of the first public case of AIDS. Michael did a retrospective of how AIDS affected Edmonton, what steps were taken, how networks were built, even the toll that the constant death of friends had on those very activists. It was a subtle reminder that we have come a long way and that we still have a way to go.

For their 25th anniversary campaign HIV Edmonton has planned a legacy garden, a coffee-table book to commemorate the champions of the HIV/AIDS movement in Edmonton, and a gala. I look forward to celebrating with you.

AIDS started out affecting what we thought was one specific group and now kills people from every walk of life. It particularly preys on the vulnerable, but no one is safe unless they take the precautions.

For this year HIV Edmonton is working with Starbucks on a World AIDS Day fundraiser, so please consider getting your coffee from them next Tuesday, December 1. As well, there is a vigil at the Citadel Theatre on December 1, and events are also planned for Calgary and elsewhere across Alberta.

Please support AIDS research. Congratulations to HIV Edmonton on 25 years of support for that community.

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

#### November Movement

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the month of November thousands of men and women world-wide raise awareness about the risks men face in terms of prostate cancer, thereby seeking to increase early detection, diagnosis, and effective treatment. This movement is referred to as Movember and takes place in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and in Canada.

Created in Australia, Movember was inspired by the women's health movement and the idea that men were lacking a way to actively engage themselves in their own health. The rules of Movember are simple: men grow moustaches, women wear fake ones, no one can shave from the 1st to the 30th of the month, and

everyone works together to raise money to change the face of men's health. Mr. Speaker, this is an incredible cause, that I stood for right away. Movember is in its sixth consecutive year and has raised over \$60 million for prostate cancer.

I am a member of the LAO Team Mo, and to date my team has raised \$590 for this cause, a number which we hope to double in the final days of this month. Indeed, on Saturday I will be auctioning off my moustache to raise further funds for this cause. If you'd like some information on how to get involved with that, please come and see me later.

To learn more about Movember and to donate to the LAO Team Mo and the fine moustaches like mine across Canada, please visit [www.movember.com](http://www.movember.com).

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I take it that if one were to use tweezers and individually pluck out the whiskers, there would be double value, right?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

### Violence against Women

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 25, 1960, Rafael Trujillo, then the dictator of the Dominican Republic, ordered the assassination of three female political activists known as the Mirabal sisters. Their deaths united a nation against their oppressive dictator, who was overthrown the following year. In commemoration of the sacrifice of these three sisters the United Nations General Assembly designated November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Today also marks the launch of the White Ribbon Campaign, supported by more than 55 countries, to raise awareness of the need to end violence against women. In Canada the campaign runs until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Mr. Speaker, acts of violence against women impact Albertans of all backgrounds, cultures, and faiths and often go unnoticed and unreported. As elected members we must continue to work to ensure greater understanding of and education on these issues. It is an undertaking I know we can achieve because Alberta has a strong tradition of advocating for women's rights. It was five courageous women from Alberta who advocated for women's right to vote, and three of those distinguished women served in this Legislature. I am proud to serve as the MLA for a constituency that bears the name of one of those women, Nellie McClung.

Mr. Speaker, let us recommit ourselves today to continue to fight for a society free of violence against women.

Thank you.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Agriculture Supply Management Sponsors

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the last week this government has dodged the issue of government-directed organizations funding Conservative Party events. The refusal to even acknowledge how improper this type of sponsorship is reveals just how arrogant this government has become. Here's the issue. The minister of agriculture appoints the board that oversees Alberta Milk. Alberta Milk gives the minister's political party contributions. Now, to the minister: how is this appropriate?

1:50

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I can answer that question quite adequately. Since the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has brought this up the last couple of days, I'm a little bit curious myself to see how that operation works. These grants are for specific purposes with measurable outcomes that also require financial documentation. They are not association funding. The association applies for the grant, but the industry benefits. The government of Alberta does not give these people any operational money.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to the Premier, then. Your minister appoints the board that oversees Alberta Milk. That organization gives money to your political party. Is this appropriate?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the boards are elected from the membership of the milk producers. The government does not appoint the milk producers' board, the egg producers' board, the turkey producers' board, the chicken producers' board. These are all boards in supply management, and they are elected from within their membership.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, this government is clearly out of touch with the people of Alberta and the ethical stance of most Albertans. This government has just cut education, cut health care, cut core public services but isn't at all concerned about government organizations funding political parties. Why are your priorities so backwards, Mr. Premier?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, these are not government organizations. These are producer groups, and it's their money.

Secondly, again, he keeps raising this issue of cuts to budgets. May I again remind the opposition that last year's budget in health was increased by \$550 million? This is not a cut; it's an increase. As I said yesterday, we're working, looking at how much to increase the health budget for next year. There are no cuts to the budget, so again the information is wrong.

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

### Education Funding

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the government considering massive cuts, stakeholder groups have been speaking out for public education, only to receive a scolding by the Minister of Education. But teachers, school trustees, and parents are not to blame. They're not to blame for creating a climate of fear around education. The actions of the minister are creating a climate of fear. To the Premier. School boards and trustees are fighting for our children's education. This is commendable. Why is the government chastising them?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the government is chastising anybody. The Minister of Education yesterday indicated that we have the most robust prebudget consultation that has ever happened with school boards in this province leading up to a new budget. What I said to the school board trustees yesterday and what I said to the ATA before is that it would be preferable if they

engaged in a more positive way to engage the public positively about education. I have never used numbers in the discussion in terms of budget cuts. That is a number that the ATA made up and is using for their advertising process. All I'm saying is that I don't need 10,000 of exactly the same e-mail to tell me that people care about education in this province. People do care about education in this province.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no good deed goes unpunished. Unlike this government, school boards know how to balance their budgets. How can the Premier defend raiding the school boards' savings and now threatening drastic cuts?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, school boards in the province of Alberta have accumulated roughly 400 and some million dollars' worth of surpluses in their budgets. The minister has met with them and asked, as we proceed with budgeting for the next year, that we may have to go to them and ask them to use some of their surpluses that they have accumulated over the years and keep any reductions in staffing or anything out of the classroom. I think it's a very reasonable ask, and most school boards that I talked to thought it was a reasonable approach.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, if the Alberta Teachers' Association's estimate of \$340 million in cuts is, quote, greatly exaggerated, as your minister has claimed, then Mr. Premier, why not simply level with Albertans by saying how much you're planning to cut?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the budgeting process is an ongoing process. It hasn't come to a finite conclusion. It's totally imprudent, in my view – and I think the school boards share this; we've just spent all morning talking about how we go forward – to start from numbers and figure out what you want to do. What you really need to do is start with: what are the outcomes that you want to achieve? Then apply the resources you have to make sure you achieve them. That's what school boards are engaged with me in doing.

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

#### Mental Health Innovation Fund

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health reported a budget surplus of almost \$350 million in the annual report for 2008-09. He also reported that almost \$25 million of that surplus was from cutting from the mental health innovation fund. To the Premier: if mental health is such an important service to the Premier, how can he support a minister of health who made such cuts to the mental health innovation fund?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about it that as we work through next year's budget in health, all of the areas will be looked at. This is one area, mental health, where we see an increase. It's something that perhaps people don't talk about a lot, and having met with a number of groups, including the minister of health, who has met with many, it is a scenario that we'll be looking at very closely to see how we can work through the challenges. Again, with our agencies that are out there, those support groups are putting together a good plan for next year.

**Dr. Swann:** The mental health innovation fund is meant to enhance the development and delivery of mental health services in the community. How can the Premier deny that cutting the spending of

this fund is directly at odds with his plan to close beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and shift them to the community?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have the annual report in front of me, but I highly doubt that it said: we cut. What we have done as part of our amalgamation of the Mental Health Board, nine health regions, the Cancer Board, and AADAC is that there's been a consolidation of funds. It's as much an accounting measure as it is anything else. If the hon. member can produce a document that we produced that said that we've cut, then I'd ask him to produce it and table it in the Legislature.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, any money cut from mental health and addictions will just show up in housing, in children's services, Solicitor General, Justice, and other core programs. Does the Premier truly not see the connection between cost savings of properly funding mental health and addiction services?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member was in the House when we did our budget estimates last year. In fact, we have significantly increased our funding to support the children's mental health strategy, that we announced last year. You know, the Leader of the Opposition can try and twist the figures whichever way he wants, but in fact our mental health funding has increased and not decreased.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

#### Nursing Workforce

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services hatchetman Stephen Duckett has finally shed some light on this government's secret plan to cut the number of registered nurses working in Alberta hospitals. At a recent meeting senior nursing leaders and educators were told that there will be significant reductions in the numbers of registered nurses, accomplished by a hiring freeze and layoffs, and this is coming down the pipeline in Alberta hospitals. Fewer RNs will lead to increased patient mortality, increased hospital stays, and increased health care costs. My question is to the Premier. How can you support a policy that puts the lives of Albertans at risk by laying off nurses?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I think that we've all been in this House long enough to know that this particular member consistently uses information that is suspect. I'll use that term. You know, we've had his secret report by someone that we were going to be cutting long-term care beds. False. We have his secret report on mental health beds. False. Now we've got another particular situation here that is inaccurate. I would suggest that maybe he check his facts.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult with the most secretive government in Canada, but we get government reports that say what they're doing because they're sure not telling the people of Alberta what they're planning to do. You know, the truth in Alberta comes in a brown paper envelope because this government is so secretive. It's clear that layoffs of nurses are coming. This minister knows it, but he won't admit it. Why won't

the Premier stand up in his place and ask his health minister to tell what the plan really is for nursing in Alberta? Come on; let's have it.

2:00

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, let me tell this member what the plan for nursing is in Alberta. You know, I have several meetings a year with the college of registered nurses, and every meeting they say that they want nurses to work more to their scope of training, their scope of practice. We want to make sure that nurses are part of the health care delivery system at the front end of the system, not the back end of the system. That's exactly what we're doing. I have another meeting next week with the same college, and it's my understanding that the college has been asked by Alberta Health Services because the particular documentation that the member refers to is actually incorrect, and they'll be adjusting that.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, did senior officials of Alberta Health Services tell senior nursing educators and leaders that there would be layoffs among nurses or not? Does the minister know? If he doesn't know, why doesn't he know?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I will say what I do know, and I will table in the House the NDP news release of earlier today. I'll ask all members to take a look at this particular release, which is entitled Duckett's Move to Cut RNs Puts Patients at Greater Risk of Death. Now, how responsible is that of that particular member to make that accusation?

#### Government Spending

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, this government had over eight months to prepare its last budget. With a projected deficit of \$4.7 billion and plunging revenues, they did nothing. This government spent \$25 million on a new slogan, gave over \$40 million in bonuses to top management, ignoring front-line providers, and over \$13 million in raises to the Premier's Executive Council, almost the same amount as the cuts being made to education. It would appear that patronage payments and slick ad campaigns are more important than core programs for Albertans such as education. [interjections] Will the Premier please explain the priority of his spending?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I didn't quite hear the question because there was a little bit of a disturbance there, but I think he was talking about how we're working on next year's budget. Of course, for next year's budget we're ensuring that we will maintain the programs that Albertans endear, and those are health, education, supports for seniors, and of course we will build the infrastructure that's necessary as well. We're going to see 50,000 more Albertans move to this province, and we want to make sure that there is the school space and the hospital space available and any other needs that they may rely on government for.

**Mr. Hinman:** Perhaps his caucus would give the Premier some respect so he could listen to the questions.

Mr. Speaker, the current Executive Council and cabinet are failing Albertans in these tough economic times. Saskatchewan's conservative government is doing better. It is Grey Cup time, and Saskatchewan will be playing instead of Calgary. They will have their best talent on the field. Why doesn't this Premier have his best talent in cabinet and Executive Council? He has better. Will the Premier do the right thing and release his cabinet and Executive Council and appoint those with the best talent, experience, and competency,

currently relegated to the backbenches, in place of his second-string cabinet ministers?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'm not quite sure if there was a question in there or an oral statement. One thing, though, is that our two neighbouring provinces at the end of this year will be adding to their debt. This province will not be adding to the debt. We'll be using a cash surplus fund that we very wisely set up a number of years ago to help cushion the blow of the rapid drop of our revenue stream. Mr. Speaker, I know no other jurisdiction in the country of Canada or, indeed, in North America is in such a good fiscal position as the province of Alberta.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if one listens, one may learn. That wasn't an answer that was acceptable to Albertans.

The exorbitant bonuses and wage increases were wrong and need to be returned to the taxpayers of Alberta. They are running a multibillion-dollar deficit at taxpayers' expense. Will the Premier do the right thing: release his cabinet and Executive Council, and appoint new ministers and Executive Council members at the salary rates that were in place before the last election?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Actually, there are a number of things in that statement that the member made. First of all, the bonuses that he was referring to: last March I said that those would come to an end. They were more a supplementary payment, I think, to deputies, to senior management within government. So that's about \$44 million that will not occur this year. Also, between cabinet and the Premier's office we have taken a reduction in the remuneration to those positions.

The other is that in terms of the overall government services we will ensure that we get the most value for dollar for every dollar that's spent on those services. We are going through a value review. All departments are pitching in. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has met with municipalities trying to narrow down the 77 different grants that there are and then 13 ministries down to one ministry and maybe four or five grants.

Then, of course, when we talk about giving money back, I think the hon. member did receive a relocation allowance, and since he's back in the building, maybe he wants to give it back.

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

#### PDD Community Board Funding

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports said in this House that "some community boards are making in-year adjustments to their service provider contracts in order to meet their budget targets for this year." To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: can the minister tell the vulnerable people who rely on PDD supports how much each community board must recoup from the service providers in the middle of this fiscal year to meet their budget goals?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's important for me to tell you that, especially in these difficult economic times, supporting Albertans most in need is a priority of this government, and our commitment remains to assisting the most vulnerable Albertans. We continue to focus on supporting PDD clients with the resources available. Funding for the PDD program alone has more than doubled since 1999 while the number of individuals served has increased by about 21 per cent. As part of this, this year's budget

includes an increase to address the increasing complexity of client needs and caseload growth.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't quite the answer I was looking for.

How can the minister defend this adjustment – read cut – when it makes it impossible for service providers to plan long-term program goals, let alone short-term goals, when they are told to hand back money to the government in the middle of a fiscal year?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that some community boards are making the in-year adjustments to their service provider contracts in order to meet their budget targets for this year. This is a process that we're doing throughout our different departments. It's a regular part of our business. All community boards are expected to balance their budgets.

As for next year our budget has not been finalized. As I said, like most government departments this is a process that we're in right now. We have increased the amount of money that has gone into our PDD budget. I want to remind everyone in this room that 95 per cent of our PDD clients also collect AISH benefits. That's another \$704 million that this government puts out for our AISH clients on top of the \$604 million that we put into PDD.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Partly answered my third question. If the minister is taking this action right now, in the middle of this fiscal year – I realize that the budget is being discussed right now, but these service providers need the information now so that they can properly plan. Are there any plans to work on a three-year budget plan rather than year by year by year? These people don't know what's going on, and we are losing service providers to the vulnerable people in this province.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, the way that we fund our service providers really hasn't changed over the years. I think that all of them are aware of the pressures that we are under. I visited a number of the service providers in the last 18 months, and I can tell you that we have some excellent service providers that are very innovative and creative. They've been able to look at their own budgets and see where they can stretch those dollars so that we get the best outcomes possible for all of our PDD clients.

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

## 2:10 Municipal Accountability

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past spring I introduced Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. Issues raised with this bill were about accountability and transparency of municipalities. All of my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is the minister doing to ensure that municipalities are accountable and transparent?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect all levels of government, whether it be federal, provincial, or

municipal, to be responsible and accountable with their tax dollars. I also want to emphasize that this is a priority for municipal leaders. What we have in place is the Municipal Government Act, that sets standards for financial reporting. We have the accountability framework, that is improving the reporting on grants, and more recently Bill 23, which improves assessment appeal systems. Ensuring that we have accountable municipalities is a priority for this government and also a priority for me.

**Mr. Johnston:** My first supplemental to the same minister: what is the minister willing to do to ensure greater accountability and transparency in municipalities?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are some potential actions that we can take with the existing resources such as adopting cyclical municipal corporate reviews, requiring management letters to be made public, and developing a web portal to support better public access to information. A fourth is to ensure the independence of municipal auditors. There is no doubt that this process has sharpened our focus.

**Mr. Johnston:** No more questions, Mr. Speaker.

## Domestic Violence

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Speaker, continuing to take the same action and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. At this time we have more women who are assaulted in domestic situations than ever before. Fifty per cent, half, of those women who approach shelters have to be turned away. Understandably, women with children get first access to shelters and services, but it guarantees that women without children will be turned away. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. What new approaches have been developed to specifically assist women without children who suffer domestic assault and violence?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** I think, Mr. Speaker, that it would be fair to say that Treasury Board doesn't get into the interministerial stuff. I will say that there is a sexual assault shelter in Lloydminster that I am very familiar with. I know that they have been working with the minister, with the department. The circumstances around so many are changing because there are so many different family stresses or situations. I don't have any specific response for her. She might be able to reappropriate her question to them, but I can tell you that we are very aware of the importance in our communities of these centres.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Solicitor General. Victims of domestic assault are victims of crime. So given that the victims of crime fund has amassed a considerable surplus in the range of \$40 million, which continues to grow, what new programs for the prevention of domestic assault and violence have been piloted or funded through this mountain of money?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specifics on any particular program, but I will say that we have increased funding substantially over the last couple of years to victims of violence, including victims of family violence, so we are doing what we can.

**Ms Blakeman:** You fund \$4 million a year and with a \$40 million surplus.



To the President of the Treasury Board. As politicians we have utterly failed to deliver on promises to reduce child poverty and domestic assault. I'll remind everyone that children are not Cabbage Patch dolls. Poor children come from poor families. If they are single-parent families, 80 per cent of them will be headed by women. With all the resources that Alberta has compared to other provinces, why are we not leaders in these areas?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, it's really unfair to suggest that we're not leaders in caring for those in Alberta that are vulnerable. Not only on the issue that the hon. member brings up, we have probably, well, some of the biggest support programs, departments in the country. We fund the social aspect of vulnerable Albertans far in excess of any other province in this country. So to pick out a specific program and say, "There, you're not quite giving them as much as I'd like; therefore, you don't care about women and children in those areas" is just unfair, and it's not true.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

#### Heritage Savings Trust Fund

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1976 Premier Peter Lougheed created the Alberta heritage fund. In this very room he eloquently asked this question:

Are we prepared as a province to put aside substantial sums of current revenues from the sale of non-replaceable . . . oil production for the sake of our children and for our grandchildren and not make it available for current revenue needs; to use it for that day when . . . the wells may have [run] dry?

My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. What is this government's plan to grow the heritage fund sufficient to replace our province's reliance on nonrenewable resources for our children and grandchildren?

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The vision created by then Premier Lougheed continues in the kinds of work we've done today. At the end of the first quarter the heritage fund, which is our strongest savings portfolio, had grown to over \$14 billion. There was \$7 billion over the last four and a half years that had been saved and put into endowments and other kinds of savings funds and \$17 billion that were put in the sustainability fund, in part last year reflecting a need for more short-term savings. But over the longer term we can count on moving past inflation-proofing in the good years to actually salting away more dollars into the heritage fund for the future of our children and grandchildren.

**Mr. Anderson:** That's good to hear.

Over the course of the heritage fund's history \$30.9 billion in heritage fund earnings have been transferred to the province's general revenue account. Conversely, deposits into the heritage fund from general revenue over that period have only been \$16 billion, leaving a net withdrawal from the fund of \$14.9 billion. To the minister: after we are out of deficit, is this government committed to leaving annual interest earnings from the heritage fund in the heritage fund for the benefit of future generations?

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I add to the response I gave previously that in the last four and a half years the amount of

money that we have provided has been the equivalent of 48 per cent of the resource revenues that have been accrued by the province, so we are moving in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just point out that the general revenue fund today is having the benefit of the interest accruals. That's true. But over the future, as we get back into a position of sustainability and once we have paid down this current deficit, we will return to the original premise of providing more dollars for the heritage fund from resource revenues.

**Mr. Anderson:** Since Alberta became debt free in 2004, nonrenewable resource revenue to the end of 2008 has amounted to \$47 billion. In that same time period, however, only \$3.9 billion of that \$47 billion in revenues was invested in the heritage fund. To the minister: now that debt in Alberta is no longer a serious problem, after we are out of deficit, will this government commit to substantially increasing the amount of resource revenues directly invested in the heritage fund?

**Ms Evans:** Clearly, Mr. Speaker, that is the fond hope of everybody in this Assembly. I'd like to point out that when we have hit the deficit situation, the authors of the FIPAC report, headed by Jack Mintz, support what we're currently doing, which is paying off the sustainability fund once we are at a position to turn around before we go back and put the money into the heritage fund. I don't think there's anybody in here that is more dedicated to providing those savings for the future than our Premier. Unfortunately, today we find ourselves in a situation of planning ahead rather than acknowledging our ability to do it in the present.

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

#### Contracted Children's Services Agencies

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 209, Children's Services Review Committee Act, which did not receive debate this session, was intended to review systemic issues that contracted agencies under Children and Youth Services face with the objective of correcting the identified imbalances. When it comes to social services delivery, contracted service providers are treated by this government as second-class citizens despite their front-line, equally emergent roles. High staff turnovers result in detrimentally fragmented support for the most vulnerable. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that your ministry has similar issues with regard to contracted agencies, does the minister recognize an unfair imbalance in compensation between those employed by the government and those employed by agencies?

2:20

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, if you look at the history of our agencies and of our institutions that we no longer want to continue into the future, you'll see that we started off by looking after all of our people with disabilities in certain areas. It became very clear that the best possible outcomes for our persons with disabilities were by living in their own communities. People stepped forward and became agencies to say: we want to look after our people with disabilities in our own communities, so let us do that. That's kind of the history of our contracted agencies. We have admitted that there is a gap between what's being paid in the older type care that we're giving to some of our PDD clients and the agencies that now look after in most cases our PDD clients. There is a gap. We have been trying to close that gap, and we are still working towards that goal.

**Mr. Chase:** I very much appreciate that response because, Mr. Speaker, admission is the first stage towards correction.

Does the minister agree that the contracted agencies in Seniors and Community Supports also face the same workload imbalances as those in Children and Youth Services, where contracted agencies are often left to do more with less?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, our contracted agencies do an excellent job. They have the same goal that we have, which is to make our citizens with disabilities a priority and to give them the best care possible so that we reach the best outcomes possible for them. They do have to take the dollars that we're able to give them and make them work for those best possible outcomes. Once again, when you look at the total number of dollars, \$604 million for the PDD program alone for 9,200 people, I think that what we need to do is to work together to ensure that those dollars are working towards the best possible outcomes.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate, as I noted, the minister's admission that there are discrepancies, that there are imbalances. Therefore, I'm asking: is the minister taking any action whatsoever to correct the systemic issues that are unfair not only to those employed by contracted agencies but also to the vulnerable individuals who receive services from them? When will these discrepancies be addressed?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I did admit that there was a gap in the pay scales between government paid and agency paid, but there is no gap in the care. The care that our PDD clients are receiving through our agencies is the best care that you could receive anywhere. I've visited many of them, and I know that even if they feel that they're not being paid enough – and you know what? I don't know if we could ever pay them enough because what they do is a tremendous – a tremendous – service to all Albertans, especially those with PDD. I appreciate the work that they've done so much, and knowing how much heart they put into it, we're working towards making things better.

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

### **Education Funding** (continued)

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have witnessed first-hand the devastation when this government begins sharpening its knife. It's no wonder, then, that school trustees speak out when the government starts to talk about cutting their budget. But the Minister of Education wants them to shut their mouths and let him control what they say to the public, and he told them so yesterday. How dare the minister scold democratically elected school trustees for doing their job and defending the education system?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member go to [www.davehancock.ca](http://www.davehancock.ca) and read what I actually said before she forms a question that postulates what I didn't say.

What I did say to school board trustees is that I had engaged them this year in the most extensive prebudget consultation they've ever had, in a positive discussion about looking through the lens of: are we doing the right things, and are we doing them in the right way? When we're saying that we're doing the right things, are we achieving the outcomes we want to achieve? We ought to be able to

look at everything we do to determine whether or not it's helping us to achieve our outcomes. They're all engaged in that process.

What I was concerned about was whether or not when they signed on to an ad campaign about stopping the cuts – and don't get me wrong. I love the engagement of Albertans in discussing education and its importance. But when they engage in that process, did they use public money that ought to be going to the classroom?

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually have a copy of what the minister said yesterday, so I did actually read it. This minister's if you can't say something nice, don't say something at all approach is not only profoundly condescending; it also serves to oppress any form of democratic debate.

Now, we've seen it all before. When Lyle Oberg was challenged, his response was to send in the auditors. This government thinks that school trustees work for them, not for the people who elected them. How can this minister be so arrogant as to think it's appropriate to lecture and intimidate elected officials who are working to ensure that our children receive a decent education?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I just met with the school board chairs and superintendents this morning, all morning, talking, again, in the process of discussion about what we need to do and how we can do it better and how we can do it collaboratively. Not one of them was intimidated by me; I can assure you of that. They all engaged in a very frank, open, and honest discussion. Not one backed away from the challenge to discuss education in a forward-thinking, robust, optimistic manner about what we can do to make sure that every child in this province has an opportunity to succeed to the best of their abilities. That's what we're engaged in. It's not patronizing. It's open, honest, frank discussion about what's important.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, despite what the minister says, Alberta school trustees obviously don't believe the government is listening to their concerns, and the only way they could get the government's attention was by launching the Stop the Cuts campaign. Frankly, if the minister got 10,000 e-mails, I hope to goodness that he's finally getting the message. Rather than listening to their message, why did the minister choose to scold and bully and to get them to toe the Conservative line?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, over the course of this year we've engaged in Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. It has been a process that has been going on for a full year of consultation with trustees, with parents, with teachers, and with the public. We had setting the direction for children with special needs, in which we engaged with trustees, with teachers, with school boards, with the public. We've had the School Act review. We're engaging with trustees, with the public, with school boards, with teachers. We now have, as I said before several times today, the most robust prebudget discussion that we've ever had in this province on education about how we go forward with the resources we have to achieve the outcomes we need to achieve. There can't be any more honest, open, frank, and responsive approach that I can think of. It's taken all of my time this year.

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

### **Collection of Personal Information in Licensed Premises**

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know exactly how I can follow that, but I'll do my best.

Recent amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act strive to make bars and restaurants safer in Alberta. Collecting personal informa-

tion such as a person's age, name, and photograph is directly and reasonably related to increasing safety and security. However, the office of the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner has stated in recent guidelines: "It is against the law to scan or photocopy the entire face of a patron's driver's licence." A question to the Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General. In light of the recent amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act, are owners of licensed premises permitted to scan drivers' licences of patrons in order to capture a person's name, age, or photograph?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont points out, the Gaming and Liquor Act was amended to allow bar operators to help them deal with problem patrons and make licensed premises safer. What it comes down to is that licensees should only consider collecting the age, the photograph, and the name of the patron if there are incidents of violence or other unacceptable behaviour in and around their premises, attempts by gang members and their associates or drug dealers to enter their premises, or significant numbers of attempts by minors to enter the premises. Scanning of a driver's licence is not permitted as some information on a driver's licence is not allowed to be collected under this legislation.

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the same minister consider expressly allowing the scanning of drivers' licences in order to capture the name, age, and photograph of a patron in regulations made to the Gaming and Liquor Act? [interjections]

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, spring must be coming. I hear some chirping in the room here.

The common-sense guidelines on the collection of limited personal information – name, age, and photograph – were developed with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It was important to work with the commissioner to have guidelines that would help licensees comply with the Personal Information Protection Act when collecting information under the Gaming and Liquor Act. The guidelines clearly state: "Should a licensee use scanning technology to collect a patron's name, age and photograph, the technology must be programmed to only collect this limited, specific information." So it is a possibility.

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose that if the opposition is upset here, I must be onto something good. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will this minister consider revising the Personal Information Protection Act or regulations made pursuant to the act in order to make it clear that a reasonable purpose for the collection of personal information from drivers' licences is, in fact, to make licensed premises safer for Albertans?

2:30

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member is aware, we just recently completed a set of amendments to this legislation. It's important to note that when legislation is reviewed on an ongoing basis, anything to do on this matter of drivers' licences will be done in consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We have the most secure drivers' licences in North America. We want to ensure that Albertans have a good, secure document and that they know it's safe and secure as well.

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

#### Earned Remission for Convicted Criminals

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government recently passed legislation that allows prisoners in provincial custody time off for good behaviour. At the same time the Justice minister has been advocating for the federal government to get tough on crime by eliminating two-for-one sentencing. To the Solicitor General. I guess the rationale for providing convicted criminals time off for good behaviour is to increase the effectiveness of our prison system. It also would seem the same rationale for two-for-one sentencing at the federal level. Accordingly, can the Solicitor General rationalize this apparent sucking and blowing at the same time on this issue?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the only sucking and blowing seems to be coming from the other side of House. Let me say that we're talking about earned remission. It's earned remission to encourage improved safety in the facility and to encourage our inmates to participate in programs so that they're better prepared when they come out to contribute to society. Earned remission is exactly that. It's earned remission to give them time off for good behaviour and to get involved in programs that are going to help them lead their lives in a more meaningful way.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess while I'm on the point of clarifying things, I hope the Solicitor General can answer me: aren't these two mechanisms just giving prisoners time off for behaviour after they've been convicted criminals?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Again, Mr. Speaker, earned remission is simply what we said it is in the legislation. It's about earning the ability to get out before your complete sentence has expired. It puts it in the same parallel as federal legislation. Before this legislation was passed in this House, provincial and municipal sentences were not allowed any time off. So it was an imbalance where somebody could be incarcerated for impaired driving, for example, for six months, someone else under provincial legislation for six months, and the impaired driver, which is a more serious charge, could get out sooner than someone under provincial legislation.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, while some individuals may look at this legislation and say that it's an appropriate way to run a prison system, I'm not so sure that the average Albertan would share their view. Again to the Solicitor General: how much public consultation did your department do prior to implementing this legislation that will see convicted criminals get time off for good behaviour?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with Albertans, and the Albertans that I talked to do believe in fair and balanced sentences.

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

#### AgriRecovery Program

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cattle producers in Alberta are facing many challenges. Dry conditions this summer in some parts of the province added existing pressures by contributing to reduce the availability of feed. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I understand that the Alberta

Beef Producers recently sent yourself and the federal agriculture minister a letter requesting funding under AgriRecovery. Minister, can you tell me what the status of this request is?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since receiving this request from ABP, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, better known as the AFSC, has been working closely with the government and particularly the federal government officials. They're assessing if this qualifies for a response under AgriRecovery. While this assessment is under way, there are other programs that are kicking in and responding and helping to address the drought situation.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, thank you. Can the minister also tell us what the criteria for AgriRecovery is and when a decision is made on this request?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AgriRecovery is meant to provide additional support to producers when a significant and unique disaster occurs and when existing programming does not address the situation. So the assessment will look at the severity and impact of the drought and to what extent it may be covered under the already existing programs.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, I guess, back to the same minister, then. If AgriRecovery is to provide assistance when other programs aren't applicable, in this situation what programs are?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta producers have access to probably some of the most comprehensive programs in the country. This fall we introduced the cattle price insurance program, the first of its kind in Alberta, available only in Alberta. It'll help address the impact of the drought in future years. AgriInsurance and AgriStability are also available under Growing Forward, that is now in the new program. The AFSC also provides production insurance, hay insurance, pasture insurance, all of which respond to the effects of the drought. The truth of the matter is that people have to have an uptake of this insurance to protect themselves.

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

#### **Affordable Housing**

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shelter numbers are up, rent subsidies have run out, people are waiting the same two years to get into affordable housing, and food bank use has increased in the province of Alberta by 61 per cent. Despite these facts, the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs returns from luncheons boasting about the great job she's doing. To the minister: will the minister admit that changes to the homelessness and eviction prevention program were more about improving the department's bottom line than keeping people in their homes?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to speak to the rent supplement program that we offer to Albertans in need. It is based on a priority list. It's a program that has \$90 million, that assists 40,000 Albertans. For the emergency side of the program I

would refer to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, who administers that.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was reported that a disabled mother and daughter who lost their home in Camrose because of a fire may also lose their rent subsidy because they can't find an accessible apartment soon enough. What does the minister have to say to this family?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, something that would be that serious, that I personally have not heard about as the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, I'd ask the hon. member to give me that information, and that individual will be assisted immediately. But I have to tell you that with the staff that we have – they're excellent in the work that they do – I somehow think that they would have assisted this individual already. If not, hon. member, I'll look into that for you.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will share that information with the minister.

Some disabled people, Mr. Speaker, have been denied a spot on the waiting list for accessible housing in Calgary because they're receiving rent subsidies for their current inaccessible, expensive housing. Why is waiting on a waiting list for affordable, accessible housing while collecting a rent subsidy considered double-dipping by this ministry?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's another case where I would invite the hon. member to give me the information, and I will look into that and get back to you, hon. member.

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

#### **Hunting and Angling Promotion**

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunting and angling have played an important role in shaping Alberta's social, cultural, and environmental heritage. While most Albertans do not object to angling, there appears to be a bit of an antihunter sentiment among the general population. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What have you done to encourage and support more youth to participate in hunting?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Alberta's hunters and anglers are our best conservation stewards. They put their money where their mouth is, right into the habitat that fish and wildlife depend on. That's why we have put a lot of initiative into recruitment of the next generation of hunters. In the last three years we've introduced Provincial Hunting Day and Waterfowler Heritage Days, which create new youth-only hunting opportunities. We have free fishing weekends for youth and family.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the groups that do a great job of training the next generation of hunters: Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Hunting for Tomorrow, and all the Alberta fish and game clubs around the province. They've trained thousands of Alberta youth in responsible and safe hunting practices.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: have any of the programs and initiatives you have mentioned brought in more youth, and how have the fish and game associations of the province contributed substantially to the training of youth in both fishing and hunting?

2:40

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, that's another excellent question. I couldn't have thought of it myself. I'm happy to report that resident youth hunters, under the age of 18, have increased 20 per cent in the last three years, from 5,300 to over 6,400. Resident hunters in the next age category, 18 to 30, have increased by four and a half thousand. This is part of an overall positive trend in hunting and angling. In 2008 we sold 3,000 more WIN cards, 12,000 more sport fishing licences, and 39,000 more bird and big game licences than we did in 2006. This is contrary to trends in other jurisdictions in North America. These young hunters are conservationists in training. The future is bright.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Our youth hunters are very Internet savvy, so is your department doing anything to communicate with them online, and have you considered what other jurisdictions, even some parts of Alberta, are doing by allowing or enabling young hunters to train in restricted or controlled and regulated areas for efficiency and safety and security reasons?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka must be reading my mind. I'm again happy to report to the House that this past year Sustainable Resource Development launched a new website, My Wild Alberta, that provides hunting, fishing, and trapping information to all Albertans. In the last less than 12 months we've had over 200,000 visits to this website.

Part of this website connects hunters and anglers to other partners. One of those is the AlbertaRELM system, which is a new online licensing system. Now Internet licences through the RELM constitute 19 per cent of all sales. Our goal is to reach 50 per cent by 2011. This is a realistic goal. For those hunters that participate in the draw system, 54 per cent of draws, over half, now go through the RELM system. So we're definitely into the electronic age.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements, but in the interim might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

### Introduction of Guests

*(continued)*

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to members for the Introduction of Guests. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature some members of the Alberta Graduate Council, or AGC. This

enthusiastic group is the provincial organization dedicated to representing and advancing the interests of Alberta's approximately 11,000 university graduate students. I had a great meeting with them yesterday. We talked about where we're headed in terms of research and innovation and funding in our postsecondary institutions. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask each to stand as I call their name to receive the welcome of the Assembly. They are Jessica Mino, Rob Chernish, Richard Querel, and Floribert Kamabu. If I could ask all hon. members to give them the warm welcome of this House.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it's petitions and introductions.

**The Speaker:** Well, no. They're two separate. Do you want to deal with introductions now?

**Mr. Sandhu:** No.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, did you have an introduction?

Hon. Member for Strathcona, did you have an introduction? Proceed.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Conrad Kreilein, who is visiting here from Kempen in Germany. I met Conrad a few months ago on a family trip over to Europe and learned that he had planned to travel to the U.S. and Canada, so of course we invited him to visit our incredible province. Here he is just a little bit late for summer. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that he rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Okay. In a few seconds we're back to Members' Statements.

### Members' Statements

*(continued)*

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

#### Ron Morgan

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night Fort McMurray lost one of its city fathers who served in building our city over the past 30 years as a native Albertan and resident of Fort McMurray. Alderman Ron Morgan was my friend and colleague and, certainly, a mentor to many. He died last night after spending over two years in the Northern Lights regional hospital. He was only 73 years old.

He served on city council, spanning from 1971 to 2001. He was the longest serving elected councillor in our city's history. He watched Fort McMurray and the neighbouring communities grow from a small town and hamlet to a new town under the province's New Towns Act to a city council and then to a regional council, which he was so proud of. He watched GCOS, Great Canadian Oil Sands, now Suncor, blossom. He watched Syncrude blossom. He watched the town grow from 5,000 citizens to now over a hundred thousand citizens. He had a reputation as a very proud alderman who treated every citizen fairly and with respect.

I had the honour of calling Alderman Ron Morgan my friend and colleague and mentor. When we formed the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in the mid-90s, he was ever so proud.

He was considered the father of little league baseball. Recently a park was named in his honour in recognition of his great, outstanding community service in helping our youth. He was a very proud father, leaving behind six children, grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Flags are being lowered today in the region on behalf of and in respect for the Morgan family.

Recently while visiting Ron in the hospital, he said: you know, Guy, a city without a history is a city without a heart. I can only say today – and I'm sure members of this Assembly will join me – that to those who knew him, Ron Morgan had a heart. To his family and friends we offer our thanks for him serving Alberta and Fort McMurray. [applause]

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

#### **Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009**

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past spring I introduced Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to the Assembly for considering this bill. Brought forward with this bill was the opportunity to highlight several areas that I believe needed improving; namely, accountability and transparency of municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 was referred to the all-party Standing Committee on Community Services. The committee had the opportunity to hear from Albertans from all across the province. I would like to thank all those that took the time to share their thoughts and concerns with the committee. Yesterday the Standing Committee on Community Services met to issue its final report on Bill 202, which will be tabled today by the chair.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the recommendations that are being put forth with this report. And I am pleased that the Minister of Municipal Affairs was able to bring a viable option to the committee that not only addressed the intent of Bill 202 but also the concerns that were raised by municipalities with regard to the bill. Not only is the minister committed to bringing forward meaningful and important changes, but I also believe that as a result of Bill 202, municipalities will take steps to further improve their accountability and transparency to their citizens. Though Bill 202 has not been passed, I am pleased that the notions of accountability and transparency in municipalities came to the forefront.

Thank you again to the Assembly and the committee for consideration of Bill 202. I look forward to seeing the minister's recommendations implemented.

#### **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services it is my honour today to table copies of the committee's report on Bill 202, Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and referred to the committee on March 16, 2009. Bill 202 raised many important matters, and the

hon. Member for Calgary-Hays should be commended for his work in bringing the bill forward.

I would like to extend the committee's sincere appreciation to the organizations, municipalities, and individual Albertans who took the time to provide the committee with their submissions and presentations. I would like to thank the minister and officials from Alberta Municipal Affairs for their input on the bill and to acknowledge the support provided to the committee by the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. I must also thank my fellow committee members, representing all parties in the Assembly, who worked together over the past several months to carry out a meaningful review of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, the report recommends that Bill 202 not proceed. I would request the concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report on Bill 202, Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009.

**2:50**

**The Speaker:** This is a request that needs the approval of the Assembly. All those in the Assembly who concur with the report, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Speaker:** Those opposed, please say no. The request is carried.

#### **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 2,797 concerned Albertans. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that present today or earlier today in the gallery were Mr. Guy Smith, president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Mr. Dave Scragg, Mr. Doug Lehman, and Mr. Mark Reiter. They're here to observe the petition. As I table this, I'd like to express appreciation on behalf of the House for their commitment and that of their colleagues to serving Albertans with mental illness and mental health and for their co-operation in the review process currently under way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 3,000 concerned Albertans. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Also in attendance today for this presentation are Mark Wells, from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and current Alberta Hospital employees Jose De Sousa, Willy Gardener, and David Climenhaga. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert. We're on petitions here now.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a petition received in my office from constituents across Alberta. This petition states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

A total of 525 individuals signed their names to this petition. I'm pleased to present this on their behalf to ensure that their voices are heard in this Assembly and province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present roughly 200 signatures on a petition, mostly from Calgary. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds." This brings the total petitions I've submitted relating to this item to about 1,500. I'll pass it to the page.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to present to the Assembly the requisite number of copies of a petition pertaining to the Alberta Hospital. This one says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital [as has been mentioned in this House] as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 . . .

In closing, I want to also mention Guy Smith and those who are here from the Alberta union of public employees. I have petitions of 6,615 to submit to the Legislature.

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition received in my office from constituents in Calgary. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds." I'm pleased to forward on their comments to all members for their consideration. A total of 100 individuals have signed this petition.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first one that I'd like to introduce reads:

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

This petition has 285 signatures, which are in addition to the 1,032 signatures presented on this petition last month.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to Alberta Hospital. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The petition has 1,516 signatures.

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've had a very productive fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature and given that we anticipate all legislation before the Assembly being completed as much as possible very soon, I would propose on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader the following motion. "Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Legislative Assembly stand adjourned on November 26, 2009, upon completion of Royal Assent by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor."

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 216

#### Alberta Outdoors Weekend Act

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 216, Alberta Outdoors Weekend Act.

This would designate the first weekend in May of each year as Alberta outdoors weekend in recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period today the minister of health referred to the Alberta NDP's news release and offered to table it. On his behalf I'd like to make that tabling now.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. My first tabling is the appropriate number of copies regarding the minister's education leadership recognition awards, known as the MELRA, presentations to the Alberta School Boards Association zone 2/3 recipients for November 27, 2009.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is regarding the minister's education leadership recognition awards, known as the MELRA, presentations to the Alberta School Boards Association zone 4 recipients on November 30, 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to express appreciation, thanks, and congratulations to all the school board jurisdictions across the province for their hard work this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. The first is a set of letters, most of them individual letters from constituents concerning education cuts and imposing education cuts. They are from Aaron Johnson, Nancy Antoniuk, Heather Jamieson, Rebecca Verveda, Harlan James, and Marie Jahner.

My second set of tablings, Mr. Speaker, is documents from quite an impressive meeting last night at Rexall Place, focusing on the burying of power lines in the Edmonton region. There are two sets of documents. One deals with the myths of power lines, and the other provides a lot of background to the meeting. I must say that of all the many, many public meetings I've been to in my life, that was one of the most elaborately organized.

My third set of tablings is correspondence CCed to me from Norm Dick who is very concerned about nongroup drug benefits and very upset with the government and the reply that he received from the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Thank you.

3:00

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I must now advise that under Standing Order 7(7) we've arrived at the conclusion of the daily Routine.

Well, I sat down hoping somebody would ask if there would be unanimous consent to conclude the Routine, but nobody did. I take it, Edmonton-Riverview, that you're requesting such?

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, it would be my great delight to request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to finish the Routine. Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, letters from constituents Jeff Jenkins, Megan Berry, Jordana Hinton, and Laura Van Geel, all expressing their concerns about cuts to public education funding.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the required five copies of my letter and cheque dated November 17, 2009, regarding my donation to the Lethbridge Food Bank as per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2, 2004. Half of my MLA indexed pay raise of \$146.25 is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta because AISH should be similarly increased and indexed.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of e-mails from Calgary-Varsity constituents Maureen Coulombe, Megan McCulloch, Diane Stinert, Bev Montgomery, and Hillary Johnstone, which were sent to the Minister of Education and the Premier urging them not to cut funding to education because the future prosperity of Alberta will depend on the knowledge and skills of its future generation. I applaud them for taking part in the democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is a letter to the Premier on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition from Donna Lowry regarding concerns over the closure of beds at Alberta Hospital. Donna states: "We are a family who, for over 35 years, have suffered with and over the mental illness of a daughter."

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three sets of tablings. The first is a letter from the Forest Lawn high school parents' association providing their input on the redistribution of casino funding.

The second is a letter from the James Short parents' association doing the same.

The third is 95 letters from parents from the Monterey Park elementary school in my constituency providing input on the casino funding review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an academic paper entitled The Impact of Nurse Staffing on Hospital Costs and Patient Length of Stay.

I also have another academic paper entitled The Impact of Hospital Nursing Characteristics on 30-day Mortality. Both papers were referred to by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in his questions today. Both papers show evidence that a higher ratio of RNs is linked to reduced costs and length of hospital stays and is also related to improved patient care and lower mortality rates.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Bill McAree, Whitecourt town councillor and operations supervisor of Associated Ambulance, with regard to Bill 62.

Thank you.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Motions

#### Chief Electoral Officer Appointment

21. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Olaf Brian Fjeldheim be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would note that there was a lot of work done by the committee members, and the report has already been tabled in the Assembly. I think that at this point everyone here is just looking forward to perhaps a few other comments, if necessary, but at the conclusion support for this particular report.

Thank you to all members of that committee.

**The Speaker:** This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is an important motion, and it's one that I speak to with some gravity. Just to repeat, it says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Olaf Brian Fjeldheim be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.



Now, Mr. Speaker, we all know that elections are the foundation of our democratic process. They're the mechanisms by which every single one of us attains and holds onto or loses our seats. The administration of the electoral process has to be not only in fact but in appearance impeccable if we are to maintain the credibility of our voting process. It is the job of whomever we as an Assembly appoint to this position to make sure that that administration is conducted properly.

I think it is worth noting that this recommendation, as I understand it, was not the unanimous choice of the committee. I expect that that is a reflection of different views of how an election needs to be run and whether we need to step forward into the future or step backward into the past. The concern that we feel with this appointment is that while Mr. Fjeldheim is an honourable gentleman and unquestionably has experience in running an election, it is time in this province to embrace a future new approach to elections. With Mr. Fjeldheim's history of running elections in this province, going backward, we're concerned that an attitude of innovation and freshness and openness may be more difficult to achieve.

Now, I fully understand that he is going to be appointed, and I wish him the very, very best because although the general public doesn't realize it, he is one of the most important officials in this province.

I want to lay out a series of challenges to Mr. Fjeldheim when he becomes Chief Electoral Officer. I think that if we look back at the elections in Alberta in, say, 2001 and 2004, there were a number of concerns, and those concerns are reflected in many documents. One of the most important documents was submitted to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in October 2006 by the then Chief Electoral Officer, Lorne Gibson, who only held his position for a relatively brief period. This report contains quite a number of recommendations, very fundamental recommendations for cleaning up what is a deeply flawed election process in Alberta.

The recommendations are fairly wide ranging. They include setting fixed election dates. They include a new, nonpartisan process for appointing returning officers. They include new ways of managing and building election lists and voter lists. In fact, what this document involves is a complete modernization and overhaul of Alberta's election processes. These recommendations were, in my belief, in my understanding, completely ignored by this government in the lead-up to the last election. In fact, that was an election that was plagued by many, many serious problems.

The report of the Chief Electoral Officer after the 2008 general election repeats many of those same concerns. I won't go through them; these are all there for the public to read. They address fundamental issues of how voters were identified on voter lists and note that a very significant percentage of voters had to be sworn in. It was, in fact, a swear-in rate – I'm quoting from page 52 of this report – of 26.9 per cent of voters. That's simply unacceptable. The appointment process for returning officers: again, completely unacceptable. Massive lineups at polling stations, delays in appointing returning officers, and on, and on, and on.

**3:10**

Mr. Speaker, the challenge that Mr. Fjeldheim faces now is to break with the past and to lead a modernization, a complete overhaul of Alberta's electoral process and to do it with the force of character that demands that this government listen. He has a challenge to defend democracy and build democracy in this province because we are watching election by election the voter process in Alberta decline. It turns up in an obvious number like the voter turnout, which was just over 40 per cent in the last election, the lowest in the recorded history of elections in this country from Confederation onwards.

It also turns up in the real experiences of people trying to fulfill what is, after all, the first right in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That first right is the right to vote in federal and provincial elections. Mr. Speaker, we in our office alone had an enormous number of complaints on election day from people who were not able to fulfill that right. They went to voting stations to vote, and they were turned away, or they were sent to other election stations and then sent to yet another one. They were denied access because of ID issues. They were denied access for all kinds of reasons. We also have well-documented cases, for example, of outright election fraud. We have a well-documented case of a returning officer opening a ballot box in the middle of election day, breaking the seal on a ballot box in the middle of election day. These kinds of irregularities are unbecoming of any democracy.

My challenge and our challenge in the opposition to Mr. Fjeldheim: don't return to the past; use this mandate you are certain to get today and build to the future and challenge all of us as members of this Assembly to bring Alberta into a leadership position nationally and internally in terms of election administration.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to drive home those points today because in many ways nothing is more fundamental to the value of democracy than how we run our elections. As we watch the corrosion of that process, as we watch widespread breakdowns of administration, we also witness the decline of democracy. We all need to stand up for that, and the person we charge with doing that day in, day out with every fibre of his being is the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, I needed to get those comments on the record. This issue, believe me, will not go away. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the ability here to speak on this motion. As always, I really appreciated the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. They were quick and to the point and really highlighted some of the difficulty that has happened in prior elections, the most recent one in 2008. I, too, for the record realize that Mr. Fjeldheim is going to get this motion, and I, too, wish him well in pursuing what I hope is a brighter future for democracy here in Alberta. We can look back to the past, even the last election, and realize to a person here in this Legislature that it was not run in the best way possible. This was highly evident not only in the run-up to the election but, as well, in the aftermath, where we had many comments in the newspapers and otherwise that made brash predictions like: this was the worst-run election ever. Now, I have not been here in Alberta for the full 100 years of its time, nor have I taken part in all of their elections, but I think it's safe to say that some of those comments were warranted. Going back over a little bit of the history, we can see that.

In 2006 the former Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Lorne Gibson, had put a report together, a comprehensive report that outlined a detailed process that would modernize the Alberta electoral process. Some of the points in there were crystal clear as to how to improve democracy. Who can argue with returning officers being appointed by a neutral proceeding on merit? Who can argue with set election dates? Who can argue with an increase in polling stations? Who can argue with better mechanisms for allowing people to get signed up to take part in elections? All of these goals were put into a report in 2006 that outlined a way for this government to act in a way that, I would feel, was in the best interests of democracy, by allowing and encouraging as many people as possible to participate in the election. Well, that was ignored.

Then came the election in 2008 – and I brought up some of those points here – which by anyone’s account was not that well participated in, nor was it that well run. I don’t know whether it was a chicken-or-egg thing that led to that happening. Nevertheless, it is what it is. We have an opportunity now to go ahead and fight for a better day in democracy.

After that election we also had another report, that was drafted by the next Chief Electoral Officer, which had many of the same recommendations put into place. During this legislative session I’ve asked the Justice minister: when will these recommendations be put into place? Will these recommendations be put into place before the next election, or are we simply going to go from 2006 to 2008 to 2012, never quite getting to the point where we put in electoral reform and some recommendations made by these past Chief Electoral Officers?

So on this note I’m encouraging Mr. Fjeldheim to be bold, to look at these recommendations, to act on many of these recommendations to improve not only democracy as it stands on election day but democracy as it stands in its lead-ups and its run-ups and its aftermath in all accounts. I am hopeful that his appointment will signal a day where we can look to Albertans participating more in elections, where we can go from a 41 per cent participation rate to something higher. These are difficult challenges for the new Chief Electoral Officer. I wish him well in this regard, and hopefully he will be able to implement some of these changes to make Alberta democracy work in a much better fashion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, appreciate an opportunity to get on the record with Government Motion 21, which is the appointment, of course, of Mr. Fjeldheim to the position of Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. I was on the committee. I had the opportunity to participate in a lot of the discussion that occurred surrounding this appointment.

3:20

The first thing I would like to say is that a lot of the discussions went on in camera, or behind closed doors, and I think that if we’re going to restore confidence in the entire process, more of these discussions should go on in public. There is absolutely nothing the matter with having a public hearing. Individuals other than those that are on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices could participate because there are many interested parties who have more than just a passing interest, if I can say, in the five legislative offices as we know them. I think that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer would be more widely known than some of the others for obvious reasons.

Hon. members previous had talked about elections and the conduct at election time of the office and the planning and the processes that lead up to E-day, and those are important comments. It’s a very important time for not only the Chief Electoral Officer but his or her employees. I can understand where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is coming from because first-hand I saw problems with the last election. We brought them forward; we got them on the record. I couldn’t believe that a ballot box at a mobile poll in our constituency was literally taken door to door in a seniors’ residence, and selected people got to vote. I brought that to the attention of Elections Alberta, and as a result of that, I was – zap – selected for a random audit. I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was also one of the individuals or the constituencies or the campaigns that was chosen for this random audit.

I welcome an audit any time of our constituency’s and our campaign’s books. In fact, now that it’s obvious that Mr. Fjeldheim is going to be reappointed, I hope this is going to be one of the focuses of his term, if I can use that word. I think each financial statement, not only from the party but from each constituency and during election time from each campaign, has to be audited. I can say, unfortunately, and I’m disappointed to say this – and this is one of the reasons why I did not support the candidacy of Mr. Fjeldheim – that my research certainly indicates this was not done in the past when he held the job as Chief Electoral Officer. I would say that the financial disclosure statements for every party, whether it was my own, whether it was the New Democrats, or whether it was the Progressive Conservative Party or the Wildrose Alliance or the Green, were just rubber-stamped, filed, put in a room, and between the hours of 8:30 and noon and 1 and 4 the general public could come in and have a look at them.

Now, I’m disappointed in that because I have seen errors in a lot of those disclosure statements. The biggest error I found was, of course, in the reporting of what we call the foundation fund, which is a large party trust fund that the Progressive Conservative Party has. Not only when Mr. Fjeldheim was working previously as Chief Electoral Officer but even before his time, that fund was not reported in a timely fashion or an accurate fashion according to the act. Nothing was done about it. We identified this, we brought it to Elections Alberta’s attention, and basically we were told: thank you very much for the trouble, but we’re not going to look into this. I found that very, very disappointing, Mr. Speaker. I was disappointed in Elections Alberta at that time, and unfortunately I continue to be.

Now, it’s very important that all political parties file financial statements, that they do it accurately. I know there are a lot of volunteers involved in this and that mistakes will be made, but that’s where the audit process would and should come into play, and it hasn’t in the past. I would just like to remind hon. members that there have been some gaps in the past. There has been a lack of enforcement, and whenever that lack of enforcement has been identified, it’s essentially been ignored, and I am very, very disappointed in that.

I would also like to add, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, on this motion, Motion 21, that we seriously consider in this House, when future legislative officers are recruited and their credentials are examined, that more of the meetings be held in public and that there be less emphasis put on discussions and deliberations in camera. I don’t think it’s in the interests of an open and transparent democracy. You look at our neighbours to the south and you look at some other jurisdictions, even in this country, where there is a very open and transparent process in the examination of the qualifications of various candidates for various legislative offices.

With that, I will cede the floor to any other hon. member who would like to participate in the discussion on Motion 21. I certainly wish the gentleman well in the next five years as he administers the Elections Act and our financial disclosures as we know them. I will certainly be visiting the office. I will be certainly visiting the room where all the filings are placed, and hopefully on my next visit I will see a complete audit done of each and every filing that’s put in there, not just the people who complain, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and myself.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, and I’ll speak very quickly, Mr. Speaker. The frustration that was experienced in Calgary-Varsity came from

the head of our elections group, and her frustration was twofold. In one case it was how little time was given to train people who were brought on, so I would encourage our new appointee to make sure that the election is announced in sufficient time for trained individuals to be on the spot in the various polling stations.

Another frustration, that the individual and I shared, was the lack of updated census information. There had been recently a municipal census as well as a federal census, but for whatever reason that census information wasn't shared at the provincial level. So as many as a quarter of the individuals in a very sustainable, lack-of-movement community, that represents Calgary-Varsity, weren't on the voters list, and that caused the lineup.

Another recommendation that I would make to this individual is to consider the notion of allowing students to vote where they spend the majority of their time as opposed to having to send a sealed vote back to their constituency. Obviously, I'm speaking as a representative for the University of Calgary, where thousands of students were not well accommodated. Speaking of those students, for whatever reason the decision was made to close the polling station in the heart of the university centre at MacEwan hall. If we want young people, especially those 18 to 24 to participate, which has not been the case, then we have to make it easier for them.

Mr. Speaker, my last piece – well, actually two pieces of advice. The hon. Premier has talked openly about the possibility of the election, and he even gave a month, March 2010. The need for fixed elections would cause a lot of the problems that we're seeing to be dealt with.

3:30

My last comment, Mr. Speaker. We have TILMA. What I'd like to import from B.C. in terms of sharing is the idea of a citizens' assembly with a mandate to look at proportional representation. The last turnout, the worst in the nation's history, shows the lack of engagement, so anything that our new electoral officer can provide in terms of increasing engagement will be much welcomed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to get up and speak to Government Motion 21. In particular, as a member of the committee that reviewed the potential applicants and ultimately decided on the successful applicant in terms of the recommendation, anyway, with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer, I was able to attend all of the meetings but as a result of a very last-minute illness was not able to attend the meeting where the committee members went on the record with respect to their votes about the report and the recommendation that is now before the Assembly.

I'm pleased to be able to put on the record that, with all due respect to the candidate who is being put forward, I would have been unable to support the notion that the recommendation come forward here and, unfortunately, cannot support this motion at this time. Just for the record, then, is the fact that we have members who were on the committee who, coincidentally, were also members of the opposition who were not in support of this particular recommendation. I believe one member has already talked about how this particular appointment may well reflect a step backwards. I think that's a good overarching assessment of where this Assembly will go should they approve this motion.

I'd like to speak just briefly also on one issue and also mirror the comments made by a previous speaker about the fact that much of the deliberations on this issue were held in camera. While I understand the need to maintain the confidentiality of the people

who apply, in particular those who apply who are not ultimately selected, I also at the same time believe we need to balance that against members of the committee having an opportunity to discuss substantively the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates that they observed and that are coming before the Assembly.

Unfortunately, we're not really in a position to do that in this setting because of the degree to which the decisions are all made in camera. I would like members to consider for future deliberations the possibility of moving the deliberation piece out of camera so that we can have a more transparent discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates that come forward and so that all members of the Assembly can be aware of those and so that the people of the province, should they be following the debate in the House, can also be aware of those strengths and weaknesses. As a result, I feel somewhat limited in the degree to which I can engage in that discussion.

What I will say, however, is that in going into the process as a representative of our caucus and as an individual member, there were certain characteristics and objectives that I was hoping to see reflected in the choice that we ultimately made. I was hoping to see a candidate selected who was very willing to consider issues of changing past patterns with respect to enforcement practices and becoming more vigilant in terms of making recommendations with respect to enforcement of the acts over which that officer has authority.

I also was hoping to have a person come forward who would be exceptionally enthusiastic about the issue of promoting an enhanced voter turnout or voter participation because as every speaker has already identified, we have a serious problem in Alberta. That anybody would ever undermine, negate, or dismiss the fact that we had probably less than 40 per cent of Albertans come out to cast a ballot is shocking to me. It is something which is a measure of an incredible malaise on the part of democracy in this province.

You know, while it's tempting for some folks who perceive themselves to have benefited from it – and I include myself in that category as well because, of course, I too was elected. The fact of the matter is that as people who are elected officials, it would seem to me that one of our first priorities ought to be to protect and enhance democracy and that we should be selecting someone who would also do that. I guess that at the end of the day I'm simply not convinced that that particular objective is one that will be a priority for this candidate. I hope I am wrong. I certainly want to urge that candidate to make that a priority.

The final issue that I would want to see, frankly, is having an electoral officer who is not concerned about the implications to one party versus another party when going about the job of reporting their findings, their reviews, and their recommendations. Clearly, that, I think, was at least one characteristic of the former Chief Electoral Officer in that the recommendations and observations that he included in his previous reports were sometimes embarrassing to particular members of this Legislature. Nonetheless, those reports were put forward in a way that was geared towards that person doing the best job that they felt they could to fulfill their mandate and to strengthen the legislation over which they have authority. I would want to see somebody who was prepared to engage in that same level of activity if it became necessary. Certainly, we know that this particular candidate did not ever engage in that kind of approach while he was in his previous position, so there is that concern.

I certainly hope that the candidate who has been selected and who I suspect the majority of members of this Assembly will vote to put in place will prove me wrong and will demonstrate a commitment to the things I was concerned about notwithstanding my doubts with respect to that. I do wish him the best of luck in his job. He has a

tremendous challenge ahead of him. We have, as has been stated, scored a historic low in the country with respect to our last election. I would believe it to be the case that regardless of what is or is not in the legislation around our elections, no Chief Electoral Officer could feel that they had done or were doing their job were they not very focused on undoing what I would suggest is a blight that we should all be very concerned about. That is, of course, the low levels of voter participation in the last election.

I wish him the best of luck. Unfortunately, we will not be able to support this motion.

**The Speaker:** Others, or should I call on the Deputy Government House Leader to close the debate?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

## Government Bills and Orders

### Third Reading

#### Bill 50

#### Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon in the Legislature and move third reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, I fully realize the importance of this piece of legislation. I think that we have had a realization not only of the members of the Legislature here but members of the public and members of the industry community in the province of Alberta, members engaged in commerce in the province of Alberta, that this issue is extremely important for all Albertans.

3:40

I do appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that we've had an opportunity here to debate the merits of Bill 50, and I look forward, again, to additional comments of any members of the Assembly with relation to this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join in third reading debate on Bill 50. This is a bill that we said from the outset we thought was a bad bill in principle. We tried to amend it and failed, and we still think it's a bad bill.

Here's one reason why. The AESO is mandated to make sure that we have an unconstrained transmission system in the province of Alberta, to make sure that there is zero congestion anywhere in the system. Yesterday in Calgary there was a meeting called the 10th annual Alberta Power Summit. A number of people were there. One of the speakers was Dr. Richard Tabors of Charles River Associates and MIT, the LEES laboratory. That's Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They know a thing or two about making the lights go on and stay on.

I want to provide the House here with two quotes from his presentation. Quote one: You can never achieve an unconstrained transmission system even when you ignore the cost. Economic markets move far more quickly than engineering construction projects. End quote.

Quote two: Nothing can be further from the truth than assuming that private-sector generation will be built just because the government has invested billions of dollars in transmission. The decision of generators is based on far shorter term corporate financial decisions. End quote.

We are talking here about billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. We're talking in the absolute best-case scenario maybe \$5 billion, and the much more likely scenario is anywhere between \$14 billion and \$20 billion.

This is a bad bill. It has failed a number of tests, as far as I'm concerned. It has failed to provide for appropriate and responsible public input. It has failed to provide an objective basis for deciding what kinds of transmission infrastructure are or are not critical, what kinds of transmission infrastructure should or should not be built in the public interest and the public need. It has failed to take into consideration that there are options, there are alternatives to building these massive power lines that I believe will deliver power to the people at considerably lower cost than this version.

I mentioned that we tried to amend this in committee. We brought in a subamendment to the government amendment that would have removed the sections that prevent the Alberta Utilities Commission from holding needs identification hearings on lines that the government has arbitrarily declared critical. That amendment failed.

We looked at the government amendment with its willingness to, among other things, stage the construction of these critical transmission infrastructure lines, the ones identified in the schedule on page 11 of Bill 50, the ones that supposedly we cannot live without. Suddenly the government amendment says: well, we can live without some of them for a little longer than we can live without others, so we'll stage the building here. Of course, as I mentioned yesterday in the House, the government has not seen fit to tell us what the time intervals between the stages would be, so the whole thing might be a bit bogus.

Through our second amendment we tried to put a sunset clause, in effect, into the bill and say, "Okay, let's assume" – and it's a giant leap of faith, I believe – "that the government really is correct in its assertion that we absolutely, positively must have these particular critical high-voltage power lines or else the lights are going to go off, and the sky is going to fall." Given that it has said that we can stage these, it has essentially telegraphed the message to any and all who would be involved in the planning, the proposal, the construction, and the design of high-voltage transmission lines that there is time to get your act together and follow a planning process that will involve a needs identification hearing, and if you think you're going to need that power line five or 10 years down the road, best get organized and get things going now. That got voted down as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're back where we began when we started second reading debate on Bill 50. This is, we believe, a fatally flawed bill. It denies Albertans, big and small, the opportunity to be involved in the process of identifying whether these lines are needed, and then it turns around and sticks us with the bill for them, and sticks us with that bill for something on the order of 40 years.

So we feel that we have no choice but to move that the motion for third reading of Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

**The Speaker:** Okay. We'll have it circulated. Just a second, sir, until it's circulated to everybody.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie would concur that this would be viewed as a hoist amendment?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Proceed, please.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief as I proceed because we have already given this bill extensive debate in this House. Those of us on the opposition benches, all parties in the opposition, have participated, I think, in a vigorous debate regarding the merits or lack thereof of this bill. We've had a difficult time, although not thoroughly pointless, engaging members of the government. To a person those who have spoken, and not too many have, have spoken in favour of the bill despite the fact that we know that they know that there is tremendous popular opposition to this bill. There is enough popular opposition to this bill that the government brought in its own package of amendments designed to address some of those concerns, but clearly not the ones that we think and that the people who oppose this think are the most vital concerns.

We tried to amend the government amendment, because that's the procedure that we have to go through as we make law in this Assembly, to make this very bad bill, first, a better bill, and then when that failed, a less bad bill. That second subamendment of ours was, by definition, a compromise. We did everything that we could do on this side of the House to try and make this thing work in the public interest. It still does not work in the public interest in our opinion, and therefore we are advocating that the bill be hoisted, and that is the intent of this amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that we, from this point on, will be debating the amendment, and I'm sure that there are others in the House who would like to get on the record about this. I think I'm clearly on the record, as are many others in this House, in terms of our opposition to the bill. So I don't feel that I need to say anything more about this. I'll turn it over now to my colleagues on all sides of the House to speak for or against the amendment.

Thank you.

3:50

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the process is pretty straightforward. There will be no 29(2)(a) applied to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie – he's the second person who's spoken – but 29(2)(a) will apply to speakers beginning now.

Secondly, the process is that all members may participate in this amendment. Once all members have participated, the question will be called. If the question is carried, if November 25, 2009 the amendment is in the affirmative, then that's the end of the matter: the bill disappears from the Order Paper. If defeated, then the question is immediately put on the motion for third reading.

So who would like to participate further? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, followed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Please proceed.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak in opposition to this amendment because I have been following the debates in the House very closely. I've been listening to the concerns of constituents who have come to my office and sent me e-mails on what they thought Bill 50 was. I've heard about, you know: why are you stopping the public process of where we're going to put power lines? Bill 50 has nothing to do with that. There's been a lot of debate. As the hon. member said, there's been extensive debate in this House on Bill 50.

When Albertans turn on their taps for water, they want good, clean water. They want to make sure that it's there. They want us to plan ahead to put the infrastructure in place so that when they turn those taps on, they have healthy, clean, good water.

When Albertans are stuck in traffic, and they're trying to figure out how they're going to get to work on time or they're trying to get to where their loved ones might be on time, they expect us to plan ahead so that that doesn't happen. They expect us to figure out that there's going to be a need for future infrastructure, and they expect us to make it happen, Mr. Speaker.

Now, when Albertans go to turn the light switch on, they expect the power to be there. They expect the light to go on. Mr. Speaker, they expect us to plan ahead, to say that we're going to need transmission or we're not going to need transmission. They expect us to hire the experts that know what the load is going to be on the system. They expect us to hire the experts to give us good advice, and that's what the Alberta Utilities Commission is all about. They do want to have a say in where those lines are going to be located, totally separate to what Bill 50 is all about. They also want us to ensure that there's going to be an open and fair tendering process to build that infrastructure, and under the regulated electrical system, that's important. Bill 50 is going to allow us to do that.

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Speaker, has recently endorsed Bill 50, and I think that's an important step. It shows that the economic concerns of the capital region should be addressed by this as well.

So whether the hon. member believes that this is an important piece of legislation or not is his opinion. But introducing an amendment to effectively hoist the bill and kill the bill, I believe that's the wrong thing to do. I believe that the debate in this House has clearly pointed to the need for this legislation. As such, I am a hundred per cent in favour of us moving forward with the legislation and, therefore, opposed to the amendment and would encourage all members to defeat this amendment so that we can proceed with what Albertans need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me some time to put it out on the record.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Seeing none, the next speaker is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the amendment to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I don't think there's any question about the need for more infrastructure. The question is the process for establishing that infrastructure. I won't belabour the fact that Albertans are concerned that we're subverting a process that was established as little as 18 months ago to determine need and other elements of public consultation, including science and advisory input. This is major.

I think all we're suggesting is that in the interests of good governance, bringing power to the people in both a literal sense and a figurative sense, both sides rethink this and that in the interests of long-term stability and long-term, I think, public trust we postpone this decision because of the widespread concerns and, indeed, opposition to this reversion to a cabinet decision rather than having the very utility that we decided would be the regulator in this particular area of our development be directly involved. This really undermines, in many peoples' eyes, including my own, that this government has the long-term best interests of Albertans if they set up a commission to do this and then in the next instant take that power away on a particularly important set of infrastructure.

So I'm simply appealing to the common sense of the Legislature. We lose nothing by postponing it. We can bring it back again in the

new year and, given an opportunity to reassess both the process and the public concerns about it, do it better.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to speak in favour of the amendment proposed by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie. I've taken part in, I believe, all stages of the debate. I've actually, prior to coming into this House for this sitting, listened to many individuals, some arguing that Bill 50 or this critical infrastructure is necessary, some arguing that, no, it's not necessary, others saying they were unsure.

Some of these people on both sides of the argument are all very qualified. Mr. Gary Holden from Enmax: his qualifications are pretty decent in this regard. He has run a fairly successful company in his own right. He has some ideas on how the electrical system could best run over the next 40 to 50 years. Let's face it: he put his neck squarely on the line in taking on a government that has a lot of power and a lot of influence in this process, and I believe he did that because he thought Bill 50 was flawed. I also heard from some other people, people from AltaLink and some other individuals also, Mr. Steve Snyder, very smart individuals who say: no, Bill 50 is the right way to go; it's necessary that we do all this stuff for various reasons. I've also kept apprised of the two university professors who put together that university paper that appeared to me to be relatively clear, relatively concise, and contained some decent arguments on why we don't need Bill 50.

Basically, what I'm saying is that we've got a lot of experts on this situation. Here's what I've learned from this process. I've learned that I as a politician sitting here in the Legislative Assembly am not an expert on electrical transmission.

**Mr. Rodney:** Agreed.

**Mr. Hehr:** I thank the hon. member for agreeing with me on that statement.

However, if I look around this House, I don't see too many experts on electrical grid transmission.

**Mr. Rodney:** Agreed.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you again, hon. member, for agreeing with me.

More importantly, I don't see too many on the front bench. I know the Premier is not an expert on transmission lines and all this business. So that's what I've learned.

Looking at what I've learned and what was in place beforehand, just a mere 18 months ago we set up the Alberta Utilities Commission. Here's why I believe we set up that commission. That commission was set up to have a lot of very smart people who deal on a regular basis with people wanting to put in transmission lines, power, all sorts of stuff that is beyond me, an average Joe politician who has no idea about it, a person who is paid to listen to many sides of the argument and try and come up with an idea. But on this one I would never be an expert and never make the right call. That's why the Alberta Utilities Commission, I believe, was set up.

It takes it out of the hands of politicians and allows it to be made by a body that weighs scientific evidence and consumer need and makes these decisions in the best interests of both the consumer and business alike on keeping on the power, the lights, the heat, and all that good stuff in Alberta. Despite the government's protests –

methinks they protest too much – I don't think that we are in a real critical shortage, with brownouts, blackouts, despite the abundance of money we've spent on these advertisements by the Public Affairs Bureau. I simply don't buy it. Other people don't buy it.

4:00

I believe that the reason this is really done is to take away people's ability to complain, ordinary people's, average Joe and Jane Alberta's, ability to go to the Alberta Utilities Commission and say: "I don't like X happening. I don't like Y happening. I don't think we need this power." They don't want to get into hearing the debate line by line, session by session, all the way down the row. I'll agree with them that this is probably a little bit of a difficult task and would stir some debate amongst many communities and may hold the government from time to time in some heat in various communities.

That said, I think it was set up as the right process. It's the right process to allow for both experts and lay people alike to discuss utilities and transmission lines here in Alberta. What the government has done in this House is take away that process, that ability for average Joe and Jane Alberta to get their ideas across as to whether they need the electricity and then to go ahead and see what is the best way for that power to be delivered, the best way and most cost-efficient way.

On this boondoggle we have going on right now, it's only the taxpayers who are paying for the transmission lines. They're the only ones with any skin in the game. They're the ones who are constructing what, by anyone's account, are star-studded transmission lines that can handle, apparently, electricity for the next 40 to 50 years and do all sorts of things. I have even heard it can sing and dance from some people. The Alberta citizens are going to be paying for this.

I hope that it won't be a boondoggle, but my suspicions are that at the end of the day the Alberta taxpayer is going to be subsidizing quite a bit when we had a system that would have heard their voices, heard their concerns, maybe come to the same conclusion, maybe not. But the thing was that we had set up this process for the correct reasons, to take the decision-making out of the hands of politicians and into the hands of experts.

I thank you for allowing me to put my comments on the record.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo points out that he's not an expert.

**An Hon. Member:** Agreed.

**Mr. Oberle:** There was some agreement in the House on that point.

He then turns around and tells us that we're talking about electrical transmission that we don't need and power that we're not short of. Well, how exactly did he determine that if he's not an expert on the subject?

Mr. Speaker, he rightly points out that, in fact, none of us in this House are experts on the subject, and we shouldn't be determining need. I would point out that that's exactly what's happening here. We at no time laid out any charts or maps or kilowatt hours or anything else in this House in this discussion of Bill 50.

What we're doing here is passing a bill that allows the minister to approve a need designated by the AESO, who are, in fact, the experts, some 250 people involved over there. It doesn't put the decision of need on the floor of this House. It allows the AESO to

forward expressions of need and the minister to approve them. That's what we're approving here. That only applies for critical infrastructure, by the way. The rest of the AUC approval process, the rate hearings, all of that, and all of the avenues for public input are all still there.

Mr. Speaker, I urge members to defeat this amendment. Let's move on with a bill that's right for Albertans. Our job here is to make sure there's a system in place that when somebody flicks their light switch, there's going to be power.

That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. [interjections] Hon. members, I called for 29(2)(a). No one spoke. I recognized the next speaker. He has spoken. This is the decision I made. Now 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Peace River if he's aware that AESO seems to be biased. They were ruled biased by the courts. [interjections] No, they were ruled biased by the courts. The AUC has rejected many of their reports going forward. The AUC is the ultimate one who decides that, and by empowering AESO – and this bill will say that the AUC must receive anything from AESO that they declare a needs document – it's just wrong to bring that forward and act like AESO is the ultimate authority when they've been proven wrong twice in just the last few years. Why does the hon. member think that AESO should have the ultimate authority to declare needs when, in fact, they've been shown that they haven't been able to do that in the past?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only respond that should the AUC come up with a decision this member didn't like, he'd be standing here making the exact opposite argument. This member as well argues that he's not an expert on the power system but proceeds to tell us how to properly construct one. I can't help it. I think this bill is right for Albertans.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any other members under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My only comment in response, I guess, to the hon. member would be that, again, you know, "I think" doesn't really count for much. We had an expert. A way to go through this was through the Alberta Utilities Commission, and despite the fact that he deems we haven't usurped that right, we have. We used to have a needs assessment that went to the Alberta Utilities Commission. It wasn't decided by the AESO at the end of the day but by a body that's created, put together by this government to do this sort of stuff and given one mandate to do. I'd like to point out that in 2007 the AESO gave us an exact different plan as to what the type of need was for around this province.

I'll tell you what. To be honest with you, given that the AESO has changed their opinions twice in the last two years, I feel much more comfortable with this going forward to the AUC, where the things are. Would this not be better at the AUC than at the AESO? Why wouldn't it be better at the AUC?

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Speaker, the exact opposite question could be asked, and I would also submit that this member, should the AUC come forth with a decision he didn't appreciate, would be also standing there making the exact opposite argument. It's simple.

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess another question it begs in his response to say that we're not experts. The regulatory process of the AUC brings in experts and is a far different hearing than AESO, and it's challengeable in the courts. Even in the past that challenge is critical, but they've never filed a needs identification document to the AUC, which is currently what is mandatory under our laws here in Alberta. If AESO, in fact, said this crisis was there, why have they failed to file a needs document in front of the AUC? It hasn't been done. It's not proposed. It isn't a crisis.

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for any particular organization here, and we don't. These are independent bodies of this House. I point out again that should the AUC come up with a decision that this member doesn't agree with, then he would be standing here making the opposite argument. The fact remains that all of the access to the AUC regarding siting hearings and rate hearings is still available and will proceed, and everybody has a chance to appear before those as intervenors.

4:10

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview under 29(2)(a).

**Dr. Taft:** On 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Peace River. I am curious to know because this member's constituency may well be the home of a major nuclear generating station in the future: does the bill or the provisions of Bill 50 relate in any way to the plans to develop a major nuclear plant in the Peace River area?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, Mr. Speaker, had the member read the bill, I guess, then he would know that, no, it doesn't.

**Mr. Hinman:** I'd like to ask one other further question. Is the member aware of the mandate or the policy which AESO has mandated to say unconstrained power lines in the province – watching the cost is irrelevant, just unconstrained power.

**The Acting Speaker:** The next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we're talking about today with the hoist amendment is credibility. This government under its new leadership proposed an improvement in transparency and accountability, yet what we've seen since the Premier took over is more and more decisions being taken out of the legislation process, where discussion can take place, and being moved into regulation. All we're getting is: trust us. We had a system where people could bring forward their concerns, where they could present scientific evidence, and that was the Alberta Utilities Commission.

I've referenced previously – and I won't go into detail – the type of hearing that occurred with the Compton circumstance. People brought forward best evidence. They testified, they explained their position, and they had that opportunity to do so because it was provided. Well, taking away the Alberta Utilities Commission's responsibility and putting the decision behind closed doors into the cabinet's domain takes away the authority of the people.

If we're truly interested in what people's concerns are, whether it be need or staging or cost, then people need to have that opportunity. I would suggest that the limited time that has been provided for

debate may provide more information for people to consider the need for transmission or the placement of transmission, but they have no voice. That voice has been taken away from them because there's no hearing process.

Now, with other issues previously in this province – and I go back to I believe it was 2001. Along with an election there was a plebiscite with regard to the election of Senators. So we have instruments that can be used to allow people to voice their concerns, and if we don't use the existing instruments that we have, then people are going to be feeling shut out of the process. Why would they then want to cast a vote when less and less and less opportunity is being afforded for that vote to mean anything?

In terms of talk versus action – what is being said as opposed to what is being done – I give the Premier credit for creating standing policy committees. We all have an opportunity during standing policy committees to express our viewpoints, and as is the situation within this Assembly, there is the opportunity for votes to be taken. You know, the reality is that the government has earned a majority both in this House and, therefore, on the committees. But the beauty of the process – and it's the same beauty of the Assembly process – is that there's a *Hansard*. There's a record. The public is made aware of what is being discussed, but in this particular situation we do our best to interpret what our constituents believe. I find it rather difficult to believe that in 13 constituencies people are very opposed to the lack of accountability, the lack of an opportunity to have their views heard in the form of the Alberta Utilities Commission, but in the remainder of the province, the 70 other seats, that problem doesn't exist. So it concerns me that we're not allowing any kind of democratic participation.

Now, we've had other individuals talk about science-based evidence. We've had a little bit of slugging going on about: you're not an expert; what do you know? I freely admit and I'm sure members opposite would rise in chorus to say that I don't know a whole lot about electricity. But with regard to my hon. young colleague from Calgary-Buffalo he's gone through in depth the reports that have been provided by experts. I've read through the material but I doubt very much to the extent that the young gentleman has, yet he's basically being beat up because he's not an electrical genius.

It's our job as parliamentarians to provide leadership, not only representation. It's our job to provide information of value so that individuals can decide what it is that is necessary. Taking that opportunity away and simply saying, "We're doing what's in your best interest; just trust us," or using the fearmongering that is so frequently targeted at the opposition when we raise an opposing viewpoint, suggesting that any time soon the lights are going to go off and we're going to be in brownouts and blackouts – if that is the case, if that is the sort of Armageddon apocalyptic circumstance, then lay out that evidence. Argue your case. It should be third-party, peer-reviewed evidence that can stand up and give Albertans the type of direction that justifies the costs that are associated with this project.

All kinds of costs have been thrown out there. We've heard: it's only going to add \$8 to your bill. We've heard that by the time the projects are finished, even given the ongoing reduced labour and materials costs, it might be in the area of \$14 billion, and it might go as far as \$20 billion. We've heard the government talk about: "We've heard what your concerns are. We're not going to build it all at once; we're going to build it in stages." But there aren't any definitions. You know, what's a stage? What is critical transmission? What is a needs assessment?

It's pretty hard to carry on a debate or a discussion of philosophy without some sort of definition and common understanding, and that

is not provided in Bill 50. Bill 50 says simply: trust us; we're acting in your best interest. Yet the interests that appear to be acted upon are the interests of private utility companies. We're being asked to pay the bill to increase the share value of companies like AltaLink and ATCO, but we don't have any say or any share in the direction of the company. The benefit we get back is that, yes, our lights are going to go on and, yes, our heat is going to go on. But at what cost? The bottom line here is that we have no idea of what the cost will be. The government appears to believe that it is better to do things the old way than to look at innovation and possibly new ways of dealing with things.

4:20

Yesterday in committee I was pleased when the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod talked about the availability of a significant amount of wind power, which is southern-based and would definitely, without lengthy transmission lines, feed into the communities of Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Calgary. Hooking up to that transmission makes absolute sense as opposed to bringing it all the way down south. Another transmission line that makes sense is taking it from Wabamun, for example, a reasonably short distance to Edmonton. A reasonably short distance although, obviously, a longer distance would be to Fort McMurray to help out with the oil sands projects. There are some smart routes. To suggest that Wabamun coal-fired power is the answer to Lethbridge's circumstance is not correct.

We've also heard the argument that gas is going to go through the ceiling, and therefore we need these coal-fired projects. Even though they belch and we have the highest respiratory disease counts in Alberta, we're supposed to do it because that's the way it was done.

I've offered alternatives in this debate. I've talked about the gasification of coal. I have talked about, as has the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, bringing on wind power. Yesterday I talked about solar power. We also have geothermal. A lot of this power transmission can be built close to the areas where it's required, as Enmax is proposing.

The government is basically ignoring all the signs and saying that the type of transmission lines, which they have not clearly defined nor clearly located, are necessary, "So trust us." I have much greater faith in a collective discussion where experts judge the value of the information given and then come up with a ruling rather than any individual member in this House, no matter how intelligent they are, making a singular decision with the help of their cabinet members or, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore pointed out, putting so much faith in AESO versus the Alberta Utilities Commission, which has an oversight governance role.

To the hon. Member for Peace River: is it a crime to oppose a particular decision? You're saying that if we're opposing AESO, at some point we might oppose a decision made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. So what? The point is that if the argument we make has a degree of sense, then it should be considered. There is no chance for that consideration to take place because the Alberta Utilities Commission has been taken out of the game, and the government's closed-door dictatorship has replaced it.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, on the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been lots of discussion. There has been lots of debate pro and con about the bill,



but the majority of it, according to the newspapers, news releases, and all the hearings, has been against the bill. According to government, you know, Bill 50 will streamline the process of approval of new transmission lines by eliminating the public hearing process. Although we need the upgrades – nothing has been done for the last 20 years – we are not in dire straits. The demand for electricity has gone down as the demand in growth has gone down. We need an abundant, low-cost supply of power for job creation, for our economic growth.

This bill has not only been opposed from this side of the House. This bill has also been criticized by the Tory Party constituency associations and the usually pro-Conservative organizations like the Fraser Institute as well as economic and landowner groups and lots of industry consultants and also a Calgary-based utility, Enmax.

According to the Minister of Energy, you know, he insists that we need these projects, that they are very, very critical to prevent blackouts and that we don't want to be freezing in the cold on dark nights. But lots in industry are questioning the exaggeration by the minister.

There's going to be a shortcut in the process if Bill 50 is passed. There's criticism about the cost of all those new transmission lines. It goes from \$5 billion to \$14 billion to \$20 billion to \$25 billion, so we are not even sure about the costs. In the year 2007 AESO said that it would be 3 and a half billion dollars. In three years we haven't doubled in population or we haven't doubled in industry growth, but all of a sudden there's a big demand for power. I don't think AESO has really done their homework.

The University of Calgary School of Public Policy is saying that those two large HVDC lines that are proposed are economically inefficient because the DC lines, as was said before, are good for long hauls, not for short hauls.

The Alberta Electric System Operator assumes those forecasts. Also, it raises doubts that the state of the reliability and the supply adequacy indicates the need for an emergency process. There's really no critical issue here. You know, if it was so critical, then there would not be any amendments put forth by the Minister of Energy to build it in stages. Even in stage building there's no clear indication: will it be a year apart, two years apart, five years apart?

All the reports are saying that it is better to have an independent regulator like the Alberta Utilities Commission determine the need for projects rather than having the Alberta cabinet or AESO unilaterally making that determination. It is less likely that the project's approval and the decisions will be driven by short-term political interest and more likely that if the regulators do it, their perspective will affect the long-term benefits and the cost to the province.

Regulatory agencies typically get all the experts in, and there will be historical awareness, background knowledge to understand and evaluate, and there will be an open and transparent consultation process, a public process that will allow for a greater scrutiny of the alternative points of view and provide a forum for public debate. The process also requires the regulators, through written decisions, to provide their rationale for each decision. Passing Bill 50 will bypass all that about the public hearing process.

#### 4:30

According to the Environmental Law Centre, the bill would make problems for needs assessment and approval for transmission infrastructure in Alberta even worse. Here we are trying to speed up the process, but we are getting the opposite reaction from the stakeholders and from the people who are concerned about Bill 50. Even the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta says that forcing a new transmission build program on existing ratepayers

will treble and potentially quadruple transmission costs in the next 10 years. Are we trying to fix the deregulation mess here? It's not clear. It's just a matter of trust.

By giving it more time and considering the bill, maybe we can come up with a better bill. The Member for Calgary-Currie tried to bring in subamendments to the amendments from the Minister of Energy, and we tried to fix it, but all those amendments were defeated. I think this is a bad bill. I think we should put it off for now and come back in maybe six months, a year to consider it. We are not in dire straits.

For those reasons I support this amendment.

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

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise to support the amendment from the Member for Calgary-Currie on a perhaps different principle than has been raised before now. We've heard a lot of talk about the needs of the electrical system and who's an expert and who isn't and what routes and what capacities and all of that. I think there's clearly a concern here that this particular legislation short-circuits, shall we say, the due process that is normally in place and that because of that short-circuiting, it may well lead to errors in the routing or other technical decisions and market decisions. But that's been hashed out, and I think those are legitimate points.

What I want to do, though, Mr. Speaker, is reflect on this particular bill in the context of a much larger pattern that this government is following, and that is a pattern of centralization and politicization that is antidemocratic and, I think, is also jeopardizing the long-term political culture and economic prosperity of this province. I'm going to range widely, but take my word for it, it all relates back to this pattern and the reason that I cannot support Bill 50.

Now, Bill 50 takes control away from the due process of a quasi-judicial body and removes decision-making from the purview of that quasi-judicial body and puts it directly into the hands of cabinet. That is an unacceptable step, here, Mr. Speaker, but it is part of a larger pattern, and it's a pattern that gets played out over and over and over to the point where it's clearly an operating culture of this particular government, probably an inevitable one after this party has been in power for half a lifetime.

We've seen it played out, Mr. Speaker, as recently as this spring, when through a single, unexpected act of this government all the regional health authority boards were dissolved, and the Cancer Board was dissolved, and AADAC was dissolved. There was an enormous centralizing of control into the hands of the minister and his hand-appointed board, who were recruited at the public expense of over \$130,000 by the minister's campaign manager. Now that's, in my view, an abuse of power.

There was a day, Mr. Speaker, when health boards were a broad reflection of our society. They contained through separate nomination processes members of local city councils, representatives of faith groups, representatives of a range of organizations. Today we have one health board whose members are hand-picked by the minister of health. Of course, he was just following the pattern that this government has really refined to an art. They deepened this pattern years ago with school boards, when they effectively removed any local decision-making power from the school boards by removing their local taxation authority.

I think many Albertans would be shocked to learn that the school superintendents hired by each of their school boards actually have to

be signed off individually and approved by our Minister of Education. So we have a pattern in which school boards, which are the original form of local government and which precede the government of Alberta and, in fact, the existence of the province of Alberta, have been brought to heel through the consolidating, centralizing, and politicizing processes of this government.

We watched the same thing happen with community lottery boards. There was a time, 10 years ago or so, when community lottery funds were distributed by local boards, and in the face of great controversy and opposition this government emasculated, in fact dissolved, those boards, and brought control of lottery funding right into the hands of MLAs, government MLAs, I must say, not opposition MLAs. I've never been consulted on how lottery funds are handed out, but we do know through internal correspondence that government MLAs have access to all kinds of lottery funds to hand out. So we've seen the centralization and the consolidation and politicization of lottery funds, Mr. Speaker.

We're watching this same thing occur with land use. A piece of legislation went through this spring which gives the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development very heavy-handed powers over how people live on and use their lands and how land may or may not be managed by local governments or by individual landowners. So the very land that we walk on now is under the too-direct control, in my opinion, of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Again, what do we see? A pattern of centralizing control and of politicization. It was one of my own constituents who said to me: boy, that land use bill is a surefire way to lead to corruption. You know, favours and speculation and so on: a stage is set for them to occur, and that's a real problem.

We watched this same pattern play out, Mr. Speaker, in the centralization of control over research funds. Now, Alberta has had a very proud history of independent research funds. The most famous example is the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, but there are several others. The oldest is the world-famous Alberta Research Council, which has been around, I believe, since the 1920s. There are several others: ingenuity funds, engineering funds, and so on. All of those existed. They were controlled by independent boards or separate boards, and they were functioning close to the front lines. What did we see there? Just like in Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, we saw all of that control centralized. If you read the government's background paper on that, why? Because this government wants those research funds to serve the mandates set by the Premier. Talk about centralizing control. As if people in the Premier's office or this cabinet are going to be able to decide where the real innovations in scientific discoveries are. They aren't. That's not how it works.

4:40

The same pattern played out in great controversy in the agriculture sector with the red meat strategy last year, where we watched the beef producers and the pork producers and all kinds of people lose their right to elect their own directors and control their own organizations because of the pattern and the habits and the culture of this government to centralize control, to mistrust its own citizens, and to politicize decision-making.

Well, that pattern is playing out once again in Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, where this specific legislation spells out that it's no longer quasi-judicial bodies of experts weighing the public interest and hearing a range of testimony from all kinds of experts but, rather, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the Premier and his cabinet, who will decide where transmission lines are routed and what their nature will be. Every time this pattern plays out is another nail in the coffin of healthy democracy in this province. Every time this pattern plays

out, we subject our electrical system or our health system or our school boards or our red meat producers or our research funds or you name it to the risk that if a particular interest captures the attention and the commitment of a single cabinet minister, we can see a whole sector rearranged, as we saw happen in the health system and as we are seeing happen now to our electrical system.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is bad legislation based on undemocratic, dangerous principles, and everyone who goes along with supporting this legislation is behaving in an undemocratic manner and putting the long-term viability of our electrical system not at less risk but at greater risk. That's why I support this amendment, and I oppose this bill.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak at third reading here this afternoon on the amendment as proposed. I believe that it is necessary. When I had the opportunity to attend the well-organized meeting at Rexall Place last night, it's clear that consumers are not ready for this bill, for this legislation, and they're certainly not ready for the significant costs that are going to be downloaded onto their bills as a result of this legislation if we don't come to our senses and realize that this amendment certainly may not be in the interests of the generators or those that own part or all of our transmission system, but certainly it's in the interests of consumers.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, in debate, there is no doubt that we need to upgrade our transmission system in this province. The reason why it's in such a state of confusion and chaos is this government's former electricity policy deregulation. The hon. member talked earlier about the Charles River Associates group from Massachusetts appearing in Calgary quite recently. Well, this is the same group that advised this very same government on how to proceed with electricity deregulation and how to set up what is now a folly – that is, the power purchase arrangements, the auctions – that allowed our generation capacity, that was paid for by consumers through their monthly bills, to be sold off for a song to various enterprises, including formerly EPCOR, Enmax. There are quite a few organizations, including, of all outfits, Enron. Enron was a successful bidder on some of the power purchase arrangements.

When we consider what's going on now and the haste that this government is in to do what they want with the transmission system and to send the bill to the consumers, essentially what we're doing with this legislation is again allowing the government to proceed in what they consider to be a benevolent way and that they will do what's best for consumers. It may not be in the public interest, but the consumers will pay the bill.

This is what we're getting with Bill 50. Now, Bill 50, as it stands, if it was to move through this House even further and become law, is undemocratic, it's an unreasonable approach to transmission, and it's so typical of this government. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview articulated many different policies and programs that this government controls but discreetly controls. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt the regulatory process needs strengthening, but the regulatory process can't be bypassed. Bill 50: that will occur. Why not improve the process so all Albertans can be involved in the discussion? Albertans are expected to pay the dramatic increases in the bill – some people say that it's \$300 a month; the Premier, I think, was quoted in the paper saying that it's

a \$100 a month – but this is the same government who promised that if we'd stick with deregulation, we would see our power bills go down.

I know that whenever the Minister of Transportation is poring over his department's budgets, he is looking at the power bills in various offices and depots that are under his ministry throughout the province, and I know he's very concerned about the increase in the power consumption in the bill. I know he's not confident, like the Minister of Energy, in signing a long-term contract because he knows the taxpayers would be ripped off on a monthly basis for the duration of the contract. I know that, Mr. Speaker, to be true.

Now, the chief executive officer of Enmax is indicating that many of the lines that are proposed in Bill 50 are unnecessary and that more generation can come on stream in and around Calgary. This has been one of the proposals that the Alberta Liberals have been suggesting to the government for a number of years: build the generation on the edge of the load. But, no, we're going to build a transmission system and then see where the promoters and the developers of the generation capacity want to site their plants. It does not make economic sense, but then again we have this government with its big majority that just wants to bulldoze over the normal regulatory process to get these lines built.

Now, this is not the first time that this government has used sort of a discreet, sly way to avoid the regulatory process or override it. When Murray Smith was the Minister of Energy, going back quite a few years now, of course, on behalf of the government he overruled what we had at the time, the EUB, and downloaded all the costs that we're discussing in Bill 50 onto the bills of consumers. Before that, the regulatory process had suggested it be equally divided, 50-50, between consumers and generators. But, hey, we've got to protect those that make donations to us: that would be the attitude of this government. I think it is disrespectful and it is neglectful, if I could use that term, towards consumers.

4:50

Now, Mr. David Gray, who is executive director of the Utilities Consumer Advocate office, has recently, after he left office, made very clear how much of a bad deal power deregulation is and continues to be. He indicates that it could well result in power and gas bill hikes of hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and we know that to be true. I certainly wish he had spoken out more when he was in office, but who knows what would have happened to him. He could have been removed from office.

Now, with this deregulated system, how it was designed, consumers were the big losers. The generators and those with the generation assets were the big winners. The same thing is going to happen with Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, unless we take the sound suggestion that has been presented to the House by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie and hoist this legislation and go back to the drawing board. This government has gone back to the drawing board on many, many different issues, and there's no harm in admitting this was a mistake. No one is asking for the resignation of the Minister of Energy for this Bill 50. What the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is presenting to this House this afternoon is like a mulligan in golf, and I really believe we should take it.

If the government would like, I could set up some meetings with them for their benefit where they can hear directly from some professional engineers who have other alternatives than to force all these costs onto the bills of consumers. They can fix this problem once and for all, but the government will have to finally admit that this rigid ideology they have towards deregulation simply has not worked, will not work. Please, let's unplug deregulation and go back to a system where power is provided to consumers at the lowest cost possible. Not only does that apply to generation; it applies to transmission as well.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague, and I thank you for the opportunity to participate in the debate.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Transportation under 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Ouellette:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I believe I have to stand when I listen to some of that rhetoric from him saying that he knows exactly what I'm thinking. Let me tell you one thing for sure: he absolutely doesn't know. Never mind what I'm thinking; I don't think he knows much about anything that he's talking about here today. Let me tell you that everything he's talking about is the regulated side. Everything to do with transmission and distribution in this province is regulated. Is he saying there's a problem with that? Maybe we should be deregulating that side. Would that make the hon. member a little happier? He keeps talking about deregulation and how bad it is, and what we're dealing with here is regulation. Maybe he can answer me. Maybe he wants that deregulated, then, so that it works a little more smoothly for him.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to answer that. Nowhere in my remarks at third reading or committee or at second reading did I say that the transmission system in this province was not regulated. Certainly, whenever we talk about the generation side, we all know that that is deregulated, and we all know what has happened. But what we do know with the regulated system: there are certain parties, certain corporations who are going to benefit economically from this bill as it is currently written if it is not withdrawn from this Assembly, and it's consumers that are going to pay billions of dollars unnecessarily because of this folly.

If we can compare deregulation to regulation and we compare the record of this government, we can clearly see that with the rigid ideology, the *Father Knows Best* attitude that we had back in 2000, when we initiated electricity deregulation, we know what that has cost consumers. Now we're seeing the bill for this regulated transmission and distribution system that this government is proposing. The only winners in this will be the owners of the transmission and distribution system, and it is owned by individual for-profit outfits. It's not owned by a public utility, for instance.

The minister can carefully review *Hansard*, and he will clearly see that this member did not once refer to the transmission system as a deregulated part of the whole electricity system in this province, so sorry about that.

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

Seeing none, I recognize, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad of the opportunity to speak in third reading in favour of the hoist motion that is before us on the floor. I, as you know, listened to most of the debate and tried to keep up on *Hansard* for that which I wasn't present for or able to listen to on the program sound and had a good exchange with the Minister of Energy in Committee of the Whole back and forth on some of the observations that I had made or that I had heard others make, but I'll admit that coming into this, I wasn't exactly warm to the idea. To be honest, I think the government failed to make their case around this bill, and that's why I'm supporting the hoist motion.

I don't think this bill is savable, and I don't think it should pass. I think it should be sent back. Somebody else was referring to a mulligan, the golf term, where it's like a do over, but it's completely without any kind of recrimination or bias. Indeed, I think that's what we do need to do here.

Really, I came at this from two ways. There are two sorts of responses that wash back against me. One is that this bill was actually created to address a very specific set of circumstances: you needed the four lines; you needed to be able to do them now. Well, to be fair, that was about opportunities not taken in the past. For us to have to be put into a hurry-up mode because there was a failure to plan or to put things in place from the government, really I don't think that the cost, the burden of that should be borne by the consumers and by the citizens. If the government was able to make that case of urgency, which, I would argue, they didn't, but if they were able to make that case for urgency, then it should have been specific to the problem at hand. What we've ended up with is a bill that goes far beyond that.

I find that kind of decision-making problematic, whether it's done by the government or whether it's done by almost anybody or even in your home life. You know, if you make a very broad policy decision based on one little problem in your house or in your personal life, you find that when you go to apply that to the next situation, it doesn't fit exactly, yet you gave very specific parameters to your policy because it was designed around one problem. Now you're trying to apply it to other ones, and it doesn't work. That was the initial point that I had a problem with, that it was designed for a very specific set of circumstances, and it doesn't stop there.

5:00

I would have been warmer to this idea if it had had a very specific sunset clause in it, which essentially was one of the subamendments that my colleague was trying to make to make this bill a bit more palatable, and that was not acceptable to the government. They want, you know, all or nothing.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Then I thought: well, okay; if you're going to try and make the case for this whole thing, then make the case. I think government failed to make the case. I think they failed to make the case on need. There have been battling experts, but I'm impressed enough with the experts that I've heard that make the point about the AESO and that their case is unconvincing and overstates the urgency.

I think the government failed to make the case for the level of expense that is going to be required for what is anticipated in these lines and the kind of lines they are. I think the government failed to make the case that consumers should be paying a hundred per cent of the cost when they have no legislative input to the need, to the cost, or almost anything else.

This is where they pop up on the other side and say: oh, they get to have input on the siting; the AUC can still do the siting hearings. Well, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but whoop-de-do. You know, that's a pretty small compensation for the fact that we've now committed a whole bunch of people to an awful lot of money over a very long period of time, but hey, here's the prize in the cereal box; you're going to get to decide where it goes. It doesn't quite make the case for me, Mr. Speaker.

I think that there were other options that were available, and the government failed to consider them. I think there's also an argument that the government failed to make the case to show why consumers should pay for lines that were built for export, and clearly one of the lines is built for export. We hear from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore that, you know, there are some negotiations going on in Las Vegas around one of these lines that is definitely going to tie into what we're doing. Why on earth are the consumers in Alberta paying for that? Where is the protection that we would expect the government to be making on our behalf as consumers and as citizens? That's a role that only the government can play. I've talked about that before, too.

I think the other and the final point for me is that the government has failed to show why the consumers are paying today for overbuilt lines which will not be used for some time to come. There were some modifications that the government made through their amendments. I feel that they danced around the real issues. You know, yes, we're going to get provided some information, but we only get provided that information once construction is already started. Again, it doesn't come up to the mark on participation, particularly for those that are footing the bill.

Having watched this long process – and we've now been debating this for a week and a day – I think the government failed to make the case. Therefore, I am in support of the hoist motion that's in front of us, and I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to do the same.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the debate.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on the amendment of the bill, which of course is the last opportunity to speak to the bill in third reading, having already outlined our concerns in second reading and in Committee of the Whole.

I am speaking in favour of this amendment. It seeks to achieve the same objectives I sought when introducing the amendment in second reading to have the matter simply referred to committee and not addressed. Nonetheless, here we are. All of our efforts collectively to have this bill referred in a way that would result in its garnering a great deal more consideration and not going forward in its current form have been unsuccessful to date. It's for that reason, of course, that I'm supporting this last effort to hoist.

There are a number of general sorts of technical issues which, of course, have been canvassed at some length around why the actual lines that are contained within this bill don't make sense and why the very need for them, which the bill short-circuits the assessment of, ought to be questioned. You know, we've heard critics raise issues around whether or not the north-south line is long enough to justify at this point DC construction. If it's not, what exactly do we have planned further down the road?

We know that the demand forecasts that have been relied on by AESO are traditionally very volatile and that there are good reasons, which a number of experts have identified, for us to consider whether those demand forecasts ought to be reviewed and completed again because we don't know whether they remain valid.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We know that there are other options that are out there to address the kinds of concerns that the government identifies as underlying this particular bill or the substance of the bill, which are the lines in question separate and apart from the justification for why it is we don't need to engage in a needs assessment. But we have heard that there are other options that are out there; for instance, looking at new generation build patterns and, therefore, changing the need in that respect.

We also know that AESO, that the government continually refers to and says is above board, this expert group that is completely independent and whose word is set in concrete, never make a mistake, never change their position. What they say now is exactly what we need because they are absolutely right. They are the complete experts, and they are uninfluenced by any outside influence. Except we have a problem. In 2007 AESO suggested that we needed to build about \$3.5 billion worth of infrastructure, and now,

a mere two years later, that has multiplied three- or fourfold. Apparently they have changed their mind, and apparently what they told us before wasn't correct. Fine. If their mind can change that dramatically in two years, one wonders why it is that we should be accepting everything they say with blind faith.

Nonetheless, all of this sort of leads to the question of whether or not this level of construction that's being advocated by the government through this bill is really something that's being undertaken to deal with electricity reliability issues or whether, in fact, it's being done to address future export plans. If we are really dealing with future export plans, then what we need to consider is the fact that, you know, maybe Alberta consumers want to pay for this infrastructure because they believe it's really important for them to chip in in order to subsidize the company investments that will ultimately bring them profits for export. Or maybe they won't. But they need to know if that's what they're actually being asked to do, and of course they don't because we're not getting any kind of clear explanation from this government with respect to this.

Yet many experts, not the government's experts but other people who are experts – and I don't believe anybody really has been very successful at undermining the credibility of a number of the people who've weighed in on this issue in opposition to it – have suggested that the bill that is being proposed by this government cannot possibly be focused solely on addressing reliability issues, that in fact it can only be seen to be a matter of building infrastructure that will support export but doing so on the dime of the Alberta consumer. Then the question becomes: when it's exported, does the external consumer to whom it's exported pay the infrastructure costs, and if they do, does the company to whom it's paid give them back to the consumer in Alberta? I don't know. We don't know. We don't know any of this, so it's really not a good thing.

#### 5:10

We have issues around whether or not the actual lines identified in the bill are necessary, but the bigger problem with the bill ultimately is that it, of course, removes the ability of the public to engage in assessment of whether these lines are necessary. As we've said repeatedly before, this is a bad thing.

It's not only bad for consumers, as I've just outlined, but it's also bad, frankly, for the environment. The reality is that this whole area in this province – as much as this government wants to pretend that the way it was 50 years ago is the way it will be 50 years from now and that there will be no change and if we stick our heads into the sand and pretend that there are no environmental issues and that there aren't other places in the world where people are furiously working on more sustainable energy strategies, strategies that may well profoundly impact the economic plans that this government has today, if we continue to do that, we're going to make really bad plans. We're going to do that by asking Alberta consumers to pay for the cost of our really bad plans.

For instance, we have an energy strategy document that the government introduced back in whenever it was, January or February of this year, which actually states in the very heart of it that we can't expect renewable energy to play any kind of major role in Alberta's energy future for at least 50 years. Really. Fifty years. So the government is making plans on the assumption that renewable energy will not be a key component of our energy strategy for at least 50 years. This is the kind of presumption and assumption that will underlie this government's decision to compel consumers to spend \$14 billion on an infrastructure plan that assumes that renewable energy will not be a key part of our energy strategy for 50 years. Absolutely shocking, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely shocking.

The rate at which technology and public opinion and, frankly, absolute obligation are changing such that we need to review our approach to and reliance on renewable energy is exponential. We

thought it changed a lot in the '90s, but we didn't really know what we were talking about until we saw how much it has changed in that last nine years. Just watch in the next 10 years how much more it will change after that. That issue is something that's not going to go away, yet we're planning on the basis of a strategy that assumes that renewable energy is not something this province will be particularly involved in for at least 50 years.

This process and the decision of the government to negate the needs assessment component of the transmission infrastructure that they're designing and to keep experts who are independent and not on the government payroll out of the process is, in fact, something that will ultimately hurt the environment because it's going to push us into a strategy which responds only to the very, very blinkered analysis of this government on that particular issue, which refuses to acknowledge and adjust to the reality of changing opinions and technology as they relate to environmental issues.

Now, as I mentioned before, the other piece to this legislation which is so important, of course, is the decision of the government to effectively take what is a public and transparent issue and move it behind closed doors. You know, I just want to sort of quote. I guess it was in 2007, after the government was quite embarrassed, as it should have been, by the shenanigans that occurred at the EUB the last time one of these transmission lines was being considered. After that arose and after, you know, there was a lot of denial about what had arisen and when, ultimately, it could not be hidden any longer and when it came out that there had been such inappropriate action at the EUB, the chair of the EUB ultimately agreed to scrap the hearings around that application. He said that the board was going to go back to square one. In 2007 what he said was that the new panel will perform a fresh review of every issue, including whether the project is necessary. Then it went on to a whole bunch of other issues.

I recall that, of course, the government relied on that kind of assertion quite a bit to try and swim through the political controversy that had been created by that whole debacle. Yet here we are now, two years later, breaking that promise, backing out on that and saying: "No, we aren't going to go back to the drawing board. We're tired of consulting with people. We're tired of independent experts having an opportunity to publicly state their opinion. It's messy. It's embarrassing for us. We just don't want to be bothered to do it." That's what brings us to the point that we're at right now.

Of course, throughout this session and previously, certainly, members of this caucus, of the NDP caucus, have often characterized this government as secretive. Of course, members on the other side take great fun because we, apparently, say that quite a bit, and sometimes they'll think it's very fun to start, you know, shushing us because we say it so much. Maybe it's a laughing matter, but maybe it's what's really going on. For anyone to suggest . . . [interjection] Indeed, it happens now, and that's great. It's all very amusing, but here's the deal. You're taking something that is quasi-judicial, transparent, public hearings, full record, everyone has access to it, and you're taking that out of the public, and you're sliding it behind closed doors, and that's it. We're done. But somehow you think we're making it up when we call the government secretive. I don't think so.

I think this is a monumental symbol of what is probably the biggest characteristic of this government right now, which is their desire to dispense with any sort of open debate or opposition or challenge and instead to just sort of run it like a corporation and see the voters as inconvenient irritants to be pushed aside at the earliest opportunity. That is ultimately why we have concerns about this bill and why it is that I have to support this amendment.

The final point that I just want to make, of course, is that repeatedly throughout this debate government, who, of course, do have

loads of resources at their disposal to have people write them speaking notes and talking points – and they can reach into their ministries and get more speaking notes and talking points on various technical issues, and then after they've gotten all those resources allocated to them, they can get up and say: oh, the opposition doesn't know what it's talking about when it, you know, gets into the merits of this particular bill. They can say that.

They say that if you're not an electrical engineer, you really ought not to be even out here questioning this bill. There may be something to that, which, of course, goes back to the original position, which is why there should be independent electrical engineers, independent scientists, independent researchers, independent stakeholders, who do have an opportunity to contribute to an independent process that evaluates need. That's what this government is eliminating. In the same way that the opposition members are not necessarily experts on every element of what this bill purports to do, neither are members of the cabinet. That's why this ought not to be a decision of cabinet but rather should remain a decision that is reached through a more transparent and rigorous public process.

That is what the outcome would be were the amendment passed, and that's why I support it.

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

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the amendment.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the time that's allotted to be able to discuss the importance of the hoisting of Bill 50. I wish to speak to that. I speak in support of this. It is critical that this bill be hoisted and brought back in six months' time, and I wish to expound on why it is so critical, that this bill is not in the best interest of Alberta taxpayers and industry here. We want to restore the Alberta advantage, not continue to undermine it as this bill will do, surely, as it goes forward.

5:20

I stand to speak on behalf of what I call the true fiscally conservative and socially responsible Albertans throughout this province. They're very concerned with the way this government is unnecessarily spending taxpayers' dollars. There are three or four points this government has brought up on this bill. This government declares that it's required, they claim that it's needed, they claim that it's critical, and they use this fourth reinforcement that it's important. Nothing could be further from accuracy as far as the electrical system currently in place in Alberta could be.

Therefore, that's why this needs to be hoisted, why it needs to go through a proper regulatory process. Though I'm not one in favour of government red tape and the long problems that that can cause, it still is critical. I really appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Riverview as he discussed the undemocratic process that's going forward, the centralization of power and decision-making that's being put into the cabinet of this government. [interjection] As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar wants to declare – what was that? Commies? It's a concern, and when we have these good members bringing that up, I think that Albertans need to take a step forward and realize that we have a real problem here at the Alberta Legislature with the current government and the direction that they wish to go in centralizing power and decision-making into cabinet and the Premier's office.

We need to ask some critical questions. It disturbs myself and many Albertans that have contacted me, the casual commitment of \$3.135 billion to put in these high-voltage, they say, DC lines. To me they're still PC lines. They're politically connected companies that are going to put these lines in place for their political friends.

It's not for the people of Alberta. There are just so many things that people have sent to me. This bill has so many flaws, Mr. Speaker, and they've been brought up so many times. Because of all the flaws we need, again, to hoist this bill and come back in six months. It needs to go before a regulatory hearing. It needs to go through a needs process, and it hasn't done that. It would fail to do that, and that's why this government is pushing it through.

They have embarked on a multimillion dollar advertising campaign. Their own members tried to institute a policy change to oppose this bill at their AGM. The government's corporate partners of Bill 50 are conducting their own public relations campaign to influence newspapers throughout the province. If we go back to 2004, the projected cost of a single AC line between Calgary and Edmonton was less than \$500 million. This government is committed to a massive overbuild at the cost of Alberta taxpayers and Alberta industry. This government wants to commit to a 4,000-megawatt politically connected line that isn't in Alberta's interest.

Is this government even aware of the local generation options that are out there? I've heard from some government members when I was speaking to them that they're concerned about a monopoly in the south. It's very easy to open it up for a competitive bid. When we look at the possibility of 3,000 megawatts of wind generation in the south, the most important thing that could happen, if that's what we wanted to do, is to have a dispatch ready between Calgary and southern Alberta. If there was a dispatch capacity to match that wind generation, it would easily allow us to continue developing that, and I believe that that's a choice that many Albertans would look at. The cost of that southern line upgrade is being overlooked, and we're putting first these two high-voltage PC lines that just are not required.

It's interesting when you listen and talk to the experts and the reports. These high-voltage lines, DC lines, are very questionable over short distances. I equate this to investing at this point for a short distance. Again, of course, though, if the hon. members from northern Alberta know that they're bringing in nuclear power, well, then that changes the whole dynamic of investment to build these lines because we're going to export, and those exporters are going to pay their fair transmission fees, and we're aware of that. Then that would change this discussion. But they continue to say: "Oh, nothing of the sort. There's no purpose." Three hundred kilometres, though, for an HVDC line? It's not economically viable. Is there another agenda in the back? They continue to fail. They're really putting their foot in their mouth by saying: "Oh, no. We just want this short high-voltage DC line".

The other question. There are so many things that are not proven yet when it comes to the technology of these high-voltage DC lines that could possibly have a dramatic effect on our pipelines in the ground. We have a tremendous amount of underground pipelines for our gas and oil industry. There are questions, and there hasn't been enough research yet to see what that would do to the lifespan of those pipes in the ground. It's something else that needs to be discussed, and it would probably only be discussed in front of a needs hearing and a regulatory process. Very, very concerning.

Why has this government eliminated the independent regulator? Does it see itself above the requirement for independent, arm's-lengths review? What does this mean for landowners and other stakeholders with legitimate concerns? There are so many areas.

There are a few other areas I guess I want to go over here briefly. This is going to be a new tax. For the government to spend \$3.15 billion, up to \$14 billion, is a debt on Alberta taxpayers, and that debt must be paid; therefore, that is a new tax.

This is a huge overbuild. We need to address the line loss. We need to address zone pricing. We need to address congestion. We need to address the age. This government continues to propagate

that these lines are old and rickety after 20 years. We need to address the short supply that this government says we're into. We need to discuss the centralized decision-making. Again, the good Member for Edmonton-Riverview did an awesome job today of reviewing all of the things this government has done in the last year to centralize power and decision-making.

We need to address and look at the cost of energy, Mr. Speaker. Energy is critical for our competitiveness going forward into the future. I have spoken at length about the loss of the Alberta advantage, the \$25 million this government spent on a new logo because they knew the Alberta advantage was gone, a total waste of taxpayers' money. All of these areas are of great concern.

Let's just talk for a minute about why this bill needs to be hoisted so that we're not taxed with an immediate \$3 billion. The cost of energy is critical. Agricultural people are under immense pressure right now trying to make ends meet, and the cost of energy is critical to them. Whether they're drying their grain, whether they're irrigating, whether they're running their harvesting and seeding equipment, all of that is related to power. They have a lot of electrical power that's involved in grain drying and in irrigation, and we can't afford an increase on the line cost to those companies.

The forestry and pulp industry, again, is at a critical point. With our rising dollar our competitiveness in exporting is being undermined. They cannot afford an increased tax and cost to the electricity that they use in their pulp and paper, in their production of plywood and other wood products. We need to look at the running of high-tech equipment. Even such simple things as the magnetic resonance imaging equipment takes a lot of power. If our power bills go up, our costs go up.

It's interesting – oh, I don't see it in the report that I have in front of me right now. I've got so many expert reports. But the building operators . . . [interjections] They laugh at the idea of reading the experts' reports. It is comical.

**Ms Pastoor:** They can't understand it.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, the good Member for Lethbridge-East says that they don't understand it. She's been here longer than me, wiser than me. Perhaps she spends more time over there.

But the bottom line is that the experts' reports are critical. Why does this government laugh, and laugh out loud, at the idea of doing some research and looking at the things? They're not willing to answer the questions. The questions are critical, Mr. Speaker. Let's go over some of the questions that are brought up, some critical questions about transmission bills. There are so many that should be asked. Are the north-south lines mainly for export? That really does need to be addressed. Bill 50 is a huge blow to competitiveness because it actually forbids competition for wires and forces uneconomic choices.

5:30

Is our infrastructure old? No. The answer is it's not. Even AltaLink, when they're promoting their own company, brags about how new their lines are. They don't need upgrading.

AESO's 10-year plan. There are many reports out that say it could cost as much as \$1,700 a year for a family of four. Are these questions going to be asked by the minister? Absolutely not. [interjections] They even laugh in here. There's no chance in the future that they're going to ask these. We need to ask these questions, Mr. Speaker.

Another: what is the actual cost? Who pays for the electrical transmission? It's interesting that 61 per cent of the electricity being used is industry. If those lines go in there, it's going to be a huge cost to industry. We need to look at that.

Like I mentioned earlier, dispatch capacity between Calgary and

southern Alberta is critical if we want wind generation to come on, yet there is nothing in the future talking about that or a competitive bid for it to come forward. This bill needs to be hoisted. It needs to be come back in six months.

It's interesting, you know, that TransCanada had a video out in Oakville, Ontario, about a generation project that they posted in September of 2009. This is what they had to say. "A new gas-fired power plant needs to be up and running by 2013." Again, if it's critical and we have a supply shortage, the only quick and fast answer is to put in gas-fired generation. If it's critical, that's what we need to do. But they say, "to ensure a reliable and adequate supply of electricity for the area. Placing it close to the demand eliminates the need for costly upgrades to the transmission system." What a novel idea. Who would have possibly thought of that? Obviously not this government and for sure not the minister. They're not looking at that.

Why does our electrical policy forbid alternatives to wire? We need to ask that question. What is the easiest and most efficient way to get power around the province? The transmission regulation prohibits the Alberta Electric System Operator from considering economic alternatives to wires except in unusual circumstances. That isn't in the best interest to say that wires are the only solution. That would be like talking to our communications people and saying that there is no more wireless technology being allowed; you have to look at wires and lines and fibre optics. This is a draconian bill. It's going backwards. It's not looking to the forwardness.

It's interesting that the New Zealand Electricity Commission concluded that an Alberta model would result in overbuilt transmission and higher prices for consumers. I think I read somewhere where the report actually said that our system was nuts in the direction that we were going forward, a major concern.

Why does the minister need to have the power of Bill 50? It's interesting that Bill 50 gives it authority to designate critical transmission infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, and to decide who gets to build it. They don't even put it up for an open, competitive bid. They're just going to say: you guys build it; here it is. We get to declare it. But on June 8 through order in council they gave that to them. Then what did they do? They gave the go-ahead to two companies to start doing the engineering for these high-voltage DC lines. On August 25 they gave the go-ahead. The question is: was this action even legal? Was it ethical? Was it necessary? I don't believe that it was. Again, if you pass it, it can be legal. But is it just? No, I don't believe it is.

Mr. Speaker, there are just so many areas that need to be looked at. We need to have a competitive electrical grid. There is no question about it. There is no question that there are areas that need to be boosted.

Again, I'll say: between Calgary and Edmonton less than \$500 million. We look between Calgary and southern Alberta and the huge opportunity for wind. Let the free market come in there and decide if they want to do it.

Line loss, something that many members keep bringing up and talking about: regardless of how much electricity is transmitted, industry experts claim that the normal transmission system should experience its losses in the range of 5 to 7 per cent. [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Well, you've mentioned the concerns over singular development already preapproved prior to Bill 50. You've talked about the insider experience of companies like ATCO and AltaLink. Are you concerned that this government is getting back in the business of being a business, that they claim they've left long ago?

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, thank the hon. member for that question. There's no question in my mind when you look at the power that is given to the minister in Bill 50 that this is a blatant abuse of democracy and the rule of law. In a needs process – I mean, the hon. member said that, oh, we'd complain if the AUC had it. Well, what's interesting in a regulatory needs hearing is that that can still be challenged, and it's interesting that it has been challenged in the last five years, and they lost in a court of law. So not only are we losing the democratic process; they're bypassing the rule of law, which jeopardizes incredibly the safety of the people and, I want to say, the economic soundness of our province and the Alberta advantage that we have.

You just have to look and read between the lines. Why would they be doing all these things? Either they're ignorant of the facts going forward and they're being told we need these things and they buy it, or else they understand very well the old PC way, their political connections, and what we need to do to reward these people in order to keep them as our friends. They can't have any friends that are just friends; they've got to always reward them, it seems like, in this time and era and this economic downturn.

**The Acting Speaker:** Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. member opposite has on a couple of occasions indicated something to do with the fact that some of AESO's work, and he talks about other people's work, has been overturned – overturned – by a court of law. I'd like to ask the member if he would argue with the fact that in 2007 a decision or application was vacated – a decision or application was vacated – due to irregularities with the then EUB. It had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with AESO.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, I believe the member is mistaken when he said that it has nothing to do with the other thing. That was a needs hearing. [interjections] Again, they like to cackle like chickens who laid an egg, and they don't know what the egg even has in it. It's a major problem, Mr. Speaker. It was vacated – and I don't know if I've got the document right here – but the reason why it was vacated was because of the bias of the information that AESO put forward. The reason why it was vacated was because they showed the bias of AESO in the evidence that they brought forward and said that they didn't show the needs. Again, the root of this whole thing is because of their inability to show the needs, that they're vacating all of this precedent that's been set for years and passing Bill 50 so they can just declare it. We need to go back to a needs process. It won't pass the smell test for the AUC, and it certainly won't pass in the courts with these high-voltage PC DC lines.

**The Acting Speaker:** Section 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you. The hon. member was talking earlier about the line losses, and he was interrupted, naturally, by the members across the way. The AESO report, the latest annual report, indicates there is \$220 million of value in electricity lost throughout the province in line losses, and the government maintains that it's of significant interest that we try to reduce those line losses.

**Mr. Hinman:** Excellent question. Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's interesting because AESO's own reports show that in 2007, 2008, and 2009 the year to date measured 4.1 per cent, 3.8 per cent, and 3.5 per cent respectively, far below the 5 to 7

per cent that's tolerable under a good electrical grid system. So that line loss is just natural. It's no different than saying that our car doesn't get 200 miles per gallon unless we were to drive it in a vacuum with no resistance. There's resistance. The average is 5 to 7 per cent, and we're running almost half of that here in the province. The critical needs; again, it doesn't pass on the congestion on it.

**The Acting Speaker:** Section 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview under 29(2)(a).

**Dr. Taft:** Yes. Mr. Speaker, I noticed the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was getting a lot of grief. [Dr. Taft's speaking time expired]

5:40

**The Acting Speaker:** Do any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Allred	Hancock	Oberle
Amery	Hayden	Ouellette
Benito	Horner	Prins
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Rodney
Bhullar	Johnston	Sarich
Campbell	Knight	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Lund	Xiao
Elniski	Marz	Zwozdesky
Fritz	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Swann
Chase	Mason	Taft
Hinman	Notley	Taylor
Kang	Pastoor	

Totals: For – 32 Against – 11

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a third time]

**The 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 5:53 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]





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Trust Fund**

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