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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, February 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

On February 18, 2010, John Babcock died at the age of 109 years. He was a Canadian soldier and was Canada's last living link with the Great War, World War I. In our prayer today let us remember those Canadians who served and continue to serve our country. We give thanks to them and mourn the loss of those who have given their lives for us. Through Your grace grant them all glory, laud, and honour. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, all. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Camilla school in Rivière Qui Barre in my constituency. They're just embarking upon their week at the Leg., and I can tell you they're very excited about doing that and very excited about the program that you and your group put on. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and they're accompanied by teacher Mrs. Amanda Murray and parent helpers Mr. David Soetaert, Mrs. Lori Reaville, Mr. Shawn Dolan, Mrs. Bianca Patterson, Mrs. Karen Streeter, Mrs. Monique Perrott, and Mr. Walter DeRudder. They're in the members' gallery, as I said. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 49 of the hardest working and brightest young people in my constituency from St. Benedict Catholic school. They're joined by Mrs. Lynn Holzman, Mrs. Tina Letki, Mrs. Kristie Brahim, and Mrs. Niki Hodgins.

We had a good chat outside, Mr. Speaker, about the different levels of government, about what we do here. These young people understood the laws that we pass, and we talked about what we're doing in spring session, defending the budget. Now they're going to see what we're doing here today. We have young people that

want to be doctors, teachers, a veterinarian. One young fellow wants to be in the army, a hockey player, but none of them said politicians. Hopefully, we can inspire these young people in my constituency to run for public service in the service of this wonderful province, as many of us have done here.

Mr. Speaker, they're all in the public gallery. I would ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all of my friends in the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 guests that attended the Girl Guides of Canada 100th anniversary celebration earlier today in the rotunda.

Girl Guides of Canada has a rich tradition of leadership and community building in Alberta and Canada. When I joined Girl Guides of Canada 50 years ago, at the age of six, in the city where it all began a hundred years ago, St. Catharines, Ontario, I didn't realize that I was to be a member of the largest women's organization in the world, and I didn't know that I was about to have one of the greatest adventures of my life as a Brownie, a Girl Guide, a Sea Ranger, a leader, and a member of Trefoil Guild. On this day, February 22, we celebrate Thinking Day around the world, the birthdate of both Lord and Lady Baden-Powell.

Today's celebration in the rotunda is a testament to the contributions made by the Girl Guides over the last century. Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery – I would ask them to stand as I call their names – are Margaret Utgoff, provincial commissioner; Henny Smit-Nielsen, provincial international adviser; Lori Coghill, parkland area commissioner; Pat Guillemaud, provincial PR adviser; past provincial commissioners Lissi Westergaard and Kay Clement; the 2010 committee chair, Terri Funk; area commissioners Beverly Simpson Headon and Kathy Batty; Leslie Horton, provincial cookie adviser; Edie Jubenville, provincial program adviser; Sue Fortunka, provincial program adviser; and Enidd Isaac, chair, national international selections committee.

Seated in the members' gallery are the Guiders Marguerite Helps, Mary Gerritson, Margaret Campbell, Liz Barter, Alice Mah, Madelyn Underhay, Laura Balding, Susan Balding, Liz Cotton, Janeen Marko, Isabelle Marko, Annie Desautels, Coral Desautels, and staff members Fennie Fraser and Mary Chibuk. They're standing in our galleries. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Assembly to give them the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: I asked the question: how many boxes of Girl Guide cookies per year in the province of Alberta? I was told there were over 250,000 at \$4, so that's over \$1 million for cookies. So let's enjoy our cookies and milk.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the winners of the ATCO Olympic contest from my constituency, their family members, and the director of government affairs for ATCO. Representing ATCO is a name that is very familiar to this Assembly. His name is Mr. Roger Mazankowski. I'd ask you to rise. I'll ask the winners of the contest to rise as I mention their names as well: Lexie Lynn, Enrique Schwanke, and Chanel Perri. I'd also ask their families to rise with them and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very large group of firefighters who are here today in support of Bill 201 and to witness its second reading this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I believe they're seated in both galleries. They represent locals from across this province and beyond. With us we have firefighters from local 4739 Leduc, local 3021 Spruce Grove, local 2494 Fort McMurray, local 237 Lethbridge, local 209 Edmonton, local 867 Winnipeg, local 263 Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie local 2770, local 1190 Red Deer, local 255 Calgary, and local 2461 Strathcona as well as the Alberta Firefighters Association. With them are two other very special guests, Sharon Harris and Braxton Harris. They are the widow and son of Edmonton fire captain Alexander "Rainbow" Harris, who passed away, sadly, from esophageal cancer on June 20, 2009. These are just a sample of the very, very brave men and women across our province who lay their lives on the line every day to keep us and our loved ones safe. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2010 Olympics in Vancouver is a very special time for our country. For those who are able to attend, it will bring memories to last a lifetime. I'm introducing to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Enrique Schwanke, who won a trip to the Vancouver Olympics, along with Mr. Jason Schwanke Sr., Mr. Jason Schwanke Jr., and Alma Sarmiento. My colleague for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview will be doing a member's statement to follow about this trip. I believe they are seated in the public gallery. I would ask these four individuals to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Dave Hodgins. Mr. Hodgins started as a volunteer firefighter many, many years ago and was vice-president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and is now president of Fire Prevention Canada. More importantly, Dave Hodgins is our manager, managing director of Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Mr. Hodgins is here to witness the introduction of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010, that will be introduced later by our Member for Calgary-Montrose. I'd ask Mr. Hodgins to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then join with me in recognizing the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, who's celebrating an anniversary today of his arrival on Planet Earth. I don't know the exact date, but I think it's considerably more than that identified in a very transparent moment by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Members' Statements

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

Girl Guides of Canada Centennial

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise to mark the 100th anniversary of the Girl Guides of Canada.

This past weekend I was honoured to be a part of the celebration held in my constituency and to have the opportunity to learn and visit with Guides and Scouts, the parents, and volunteer leaders and to hear about the awesome job they are doing in my constituency.

The Girl Guides of Canada have a powerful and meaningful mission statement. They work to enable girls to be confident, resourceful, and courageous and to make a difference in the world. In a world where our young women face so many challenges and opportunities, it is important for organizations such as this one to be there to help guide them along the way. The leaders work with the girls and teach them to be honest and trustworthy, use resources wisely, respect themselves and others, recognize and use their talents and abilities, protect the environment, live with courage and strength, and share in the sisterhood of Guiding.

Over the last century hundreds of thousands of girls have been touched by the Girl Guides organization, including two of my daughters, Kristen and Jacqueline, and, as we heard, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. Girl Guides of Canada has engaged girls and women in fun activities that have built new friendships, allowed them to learn new skills, serve their community, and grow as young women. Perhaps most importantly, Girl Guides provides the tools and resources for the girls of today to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Guides would not be possible without the commitment of thousands of women who dedicate countless hours to this worthy organization. Annually on February 22, which is called Thinking Day, Girl Guides from across the world take time to remember and celebrate the birthday of their founders, Lord and Lady Baden-Powell.

I would like to welcome all the Girl Guides and their leaders who are here at the Legislature today to celebrate their hundredth anniversary and to thank the hon. Speaker for hosting the celebration in the rotunda earlier today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bissell Centre Centennial

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of this Assembly a very special occasion celebrated recently by an organization in our constituency, the hundredth anniversary of the Bissell Centre. The Bissell Centre is a nonprofit, charitable society that has been serving the community of Edmonton since 1910 with a formal vision statement of neighbour helping neighbour.

The centre started as a Methodist Church mission founded by William and Florence Pike. They worked from a storefront office at 96th Street and 103A Avenue, where the current police station now stands. Programs originally offered included a Sunday school, social groups, and a Ukrainian Sunday service to help Ukrainian immigrants settle into their new community. The mission later merged with the Presbyterian McQueen Institute, taking the name All People's Mission in 1925. When the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, All People's Mission began to focus its services to support people living on low and modest incomes. In 1935 the organization was christened the Bissell Institute after farm machinery baron Torrence Bissell donated \$25,000, allowing the centre to move into its new brick building on the northeast corner of 96th Street and 103A Avenue.

Throughout its history the Bissell Centre has been an inclusive force for social change; for example, helping Second World War Japanese-Canadians who had been stripped of their property or

advocating on behalf of First Nations people to protest laws preventing them from speaking their own languages.

The Bissell of today at 105 Avenue and 96th Street is a busy and ambitious operation, having expanded to the west and east centres downtown. The Bissell Centre has a powerful philosophy, that is one of hope for human potential and social justice. The Bissell Centre believes that every person has the right to have basic human needs satisfied and that each of us has a responsibility to care for one another.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you and the members of the Legislature to join me in celebrating the hundredth anniversary of this very important, vital institution.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

ATCO Celebrating Excellence Program

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and share a great program with you, the ATCO celebrating excellence program, that rewards young Albertans who have demonstrated leadership in their communities. Students in grade 4 through grade 12 from every corner of the province were invited to share stories about how they make a difference in their communities. Thousands responded. Of those thousands, 83 students were awarded laptops, that will assist them in their studies. The other 166, one boy and one girl from each constituency in Alberta, were selected for a once-in-a-lifetime experience this year.

With the support of the Alberta government these young leaders had the privilege of spending a day at the Olympic Games watching competition, a medal ceremony, and visiting Alberta House in the heart of downtown Vancouver. Because of the wonderful things that they do in their communities, these students were rewarded with a chance to witness the dedication and the determination of the world's best athletes. There is no doubt that they've come home inspired by the heroes of the Olympics, and we hope that this experience will encourage them to continue being involved in their communities and making a positive contribution to our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in congratulating these young people and all of the students who shared their stories through this program. These young leaders are our future, and we are so thankful that they are committed to making Alberta an even better place to live.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before moving to question period, I just wish to advise that when I call Orders of the Day in approximately an hour or so from now, I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay to rise and ask for unanimous consent to make a procedural change in the Order Paper. If you look in the Order Paper, we have motions other than government motions 503 and 505. The member will be asking for a switch, that Motion 503 become 505, that Motion 505 become 503. Unanimous consent will have to be given in order to deal with that procedural matter.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Reform

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Justice minister said that the most important thing for Elections Alberta to

do was to ensure that Albertans have confidence in their electoral system. Well, Albertans do not have confidence in their electoral system. They want to remedy 2008's pitiful 41 per cent voter turnout. Isn't the minister concerned that the erosion of democracy in Alberta is happening, enough to commit to allowing postsecondary campuses to have polling stations for students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that democracy is eroding in Alberta. Everyone is entitled to their opinion; that's what democracy is all about. However, we will be, as I said last Thursday, introducing legislation in due course that will respond to recommendations that have been made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, a 41 per cent voting turnout is not a success in most people's books. That's a failing grade.

Of the 182 recommendations from the former Chief Electoral Officer one key recommendation was to increase accessibility of polls. I would be placing polling stations in high-traffic public locations. Will the minister do the same?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's not my job to do that. It's the Chief Electoral Officer's job to do that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, that question has been raised in this House before, and I'd be happy either now or at some other point in the debate to expand on the impracticalities of that.

Dr. Swann: Practical or not, Mr. Speaker, last week the new Chief Electoral Officer said that it wasn't his job to get people out to vote. This seems quite consistent with this minister's approach to electoral reform. Was this by design or was this coincidence that you both said the same thing?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understood the question, but if the question was, "Did I intend to ensure that people could have sensible and fair access to vote?" then our response to the report will address that in a very full way and ensure that that happens.

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

Protection of Children in Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The \$27 million cut from child intervention services will without a doubt adversely affect the care of vulnerable children and youth. There will be fewer dollars for caseworkers, that are already overwhelmed by caseloads, caseworkers that supervise children and youth in very vulnerable situations, that provide safety and security when children need it most. To the Premier: how will the cuts to intervention services not lead to reduced monitoring in homes protecting children? How will it not produce that?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, children are a priority for this government, especially their safety, and those that are also in the care of government. The minister has laid out a very clear, articulate plan, and she'd be able to comment further on her plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, to the minister, then: how will the cuts not reduce services and monitoring in homes where children are most at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the cuts I can tell you, hon. member, I appreciate your concern, and I can understand that concern. I want you to know very clearly that with the change in this budget, the way the budget has been allocated, the restructuring of this budget will not affect front-line staff, critical workers, which you're concerned about. It will not affect accreditation of programs. In fact, the change in programs is because of efficiencies that have been created, and I can share that with you in another question.

Dr. Swann: That's really hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, when we've seen 75 per cent cuts in the last three years to in-home supervision. How can the minister justify these comments?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing I've learned, especially in this session, is that I need to look into the statistic that this member has brought forward. I don't know if it's accurate. Having said that, I can tell you that the efficiencies that have been created with child intervention very clearly have been with the movement of the youth that are in group homes, which on average per youth is \$14,000 per month, for more permanency in foster homes. We've created over 900 spaces with foster homes and kinship care over the last 18 months. Foster homes and kinship care are on average about \$1,500 a month, so there are savings and efficiencies in that area.

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

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why are appointments of Conservative MLAs to the Treasury Board and the Agenda and Priorities Committee done through an order in council, which is published, while appointments to the Conservative cabinet policy committees are not done through order in council but done through the Premier's office? Those appointments are done in secrecy.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, they can't be secret because everybody knows who sits on what committee, so I'm not quite sure where the member is going with it. We do have members that are appointed to what we call cabinet policy committees. They're there to talk about issues that come forward from Albertans, whether it be looking at regulations or laws that some constituents are asking us to put in place. They vet, discuss it, and bring it forward as a recommendation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: what legislative authority is the Premier using to appoint and pay Conservative caucus members to the internal cabinet policy committees, which meet behind closed doors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the CPCs, the cabinet policy committees, were put together to discuss issues and policies that come forward and to bring those recommendations. Many of those recommendations lead to legislation, and that legislation ends up here in the House for full and open debate, as does every piece of legislation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: is the Premier's exercise of this authority to appoint and pay cabinet policy committee members a violation of the Legislative Assembly Act, specifically section 37? Did you read that before you appointed those people?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I always trust you as the Speaker of this Assembly to make sure that nobody at all breaks any legislation with respect to this legislation.

The other thing is that I'm sure that across this way and in that party over there, even the party of three, they get paid for a whip, an assistant whip, and a House leader, and all of those things are paid for through the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The payment for whips, though, only applies to officially recognized parties, so in the case of the third party that wouldn't happen.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to create value-added jobs in the oil sands is caused in part by the raw bitumen flowing to the United States via the Alberta Clipper and Keystone pipelines, taking Alberta jobs with it. When I asked about this last week, the Energy minister said that no new jobs were being created in the United States because they had existing capacity in the refineries there to handle the upgrading. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Does the minister stand behind the statements he made during his estimates last week?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have in front of me what our discussion was last week, but what is important, what I was trying to get across to the member, is that there is significant excess capacity in the United States. To just assume somehow that when bitumen is going to the U.S. to be refined, there are new jobs being created is not necessarily correct. If in some way my comments didn't reflect that, I'll put it on record as being so now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Interesting. In budget estimates the minister said that Alberta bitumen could be piped to existing American refineries and that new ones were not being built to handle the flow. The truth is that at least 10 American upgraders are being built or expanded to handle Alberta bitumen. They're investing more than \$37 billion to increase capacity by more than a million barrels per day and creating more than 23,000 full-time jobs in the process. Why is the minister shipping Alberta jobs south instead of finding ways to give those 23,000 jobs back to unemployed Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what I did say to the member during estimates last week is that this is a market decision. If there is an economic business case to be made, the private sector will build upgraders and create jobs wherever they feel is the best return on investment. The reality today is that with the price of bitumen there is not a great incentive to build, but that could change as time moves on.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's not a market decision; it's a government policy. Unemployed tradespeople in Alberta need to look no further for where their jobs have gone than this government sitting over there. There are at least 10 different upgrader projects in Michigan, Illinois, Oklahoma, Indiana, Louisiana, Texas, and Ohio. Alberta's unemployment rate is more than 6 per cent, and we've lost 35,000 full-time jobs in the last year alone. Why won't the Energy minister stop sending our jobs and our bitumen to the United States and create real, permanent jobs here in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what this member has to remember is that the refining and upgrading that goes on in the United States is to serve a huge market. It takes supplies from all over the world wherever they can get it, including Canadian bitumen. I would just like to reiterate that it's this particular government, our policies that have created the jobs in the oil sands, not the policies of those two sitting there, who want to shut down the oil sands.

The Speaker: Hon. members, ordinarily on day 4 of the rotation, and this being day 4, the fifth question will go to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. The hon. member has decided to switch his place today with another hon. member, and that's the reason why I'm now recognizing the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Provincial Budget Caucus Approval

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to me leaving the PC Party in January, the government caucus met to approve the basic parameters of the budget. One of the things agreed to almost unanimously was to limit the increase in overall spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth, or 3.5 per cent, but Budget 2010 calls for a 6 per cent increase in spending, or about 4.3 per cent if you don't include the superboard debt payment. In any event it certainly was not what was originally approved by caucus. To the Premier: as your caucus did not meet again until late January, did your caucus approve the spending increase prior to the budget being printed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget was presented by the minister. It included a one-time payment of all of the deficit that was incurred by Alberta Health Services. It also included a five-year increased funding commitment for the Alberta Health Services Board to ensure that we provide the best health services possible in the country of Canada. All of those will be publicly funded, obviously. Now it's giving the whole health system continued support, and they are better able to plan for the future.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, that was not my question. When I left the government in January, caucus had agreed to limit this year's spending increase to inflation plus population growth. That decision was altered. What I want to know is whether Albertans' elected representatives had any say in this change, so I'll repeat the question to the Premier. Did your caucus approve the spending increase above inflation plus population growth prior to the budget being printed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing the member should realize is that on the government side this caucus had a full discussion of all of the issues that are facing the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in terms of finding a budget that meets the needs of Albertans. There were revisions made to the budget, and one of them was, of

course, increased funding for health because if we are going to make health a priority, as Albertans expect us to do. That's exactly what we did. We put it in place, and that budget is before this House for debate.

The other issue is about caucus or no caucus. It's not a policy issue. In question period we talk about how policy is formulated and why we took a particular stand on policy, not when or what happened in a caucus.

Mr. Anderson: Well, this is an issue about democracy, Mr. Speaker, and goes to the very heart of what we do in this House.

Just to confirm, caucus agreed to keep spending increases under the rate of inflation plus population growth. The government raised spending above that level prior to the budget being printed and then asked caucus to affirm that decision the day before or the week before the budget was presented. Is that what happened, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if I could just take that question and try and move it into a policy area but not talk about caucus deliberations, what that party wants to do is to limit spending to population and inflation, which is very good, very laudable, but in this particular instance we had to deal with the incurred deficit of Alberta Health Services.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I don't ever hear coming from any of the other parties when it comes to inflation and population increase spending: what happens if we have the same population, but the age of our population increases? When we get older, we demand more health services. That means he's saying that he's not going to cover it from what I gather from his deliberations.

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

Municipal Election Campaign Financing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government didn't think through the effect that new legislation would have on municipal election campaigns. According to the new rules, municipalities are going to hold onto funds for the candidates, but with campaign money not being released to the candidates until just four weeks to go before voters go to the polls, there will be no way to pay for most aspects of a municipal election campaign. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how is a candidate supposed to pay for signs, billboards, brochures, and even rent a campaign office without the money to pay for them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, just as a reminder to the members of the House Bill 203, which was a private member's bill, was passed in this Legislature. We are now working to ensure that when it does take effect, it is workable, it is practical, and it aligns with the legislation that we presently have. We will be bringing forward amendments to that effect.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, that should work well. We're bringing forward government amendments to a private member's bill that the government has proclaimed without consulting with the AUMA and the AAMD and C. Why didn't you consult with them before proclaiming this legislation?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again, not to defend the rights of a private member's bill, but there was a fair amount of consultation that did occur. My understanding is that there were contacts made

with the AUMA, their executive, and representatives from AUMA as well as AAMD and C, so there was ongoing dialogue that way. As well, there were a number of letters and correspondence that were received from numerous elected officials from across the province as Bill 203 was developed.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that consultation with members of the AUMA and AAMD and C that the minister talks about, whether, you know, as members of those organizations or individual mayors, city councillors, town councillors, and so on and so forth, actually happened before the proclamation of this legislation – and the minister has already admitted that it needs to be amended, and it will be amended – why did they go ahead and proclaim the legislation? Why not just hold off on it till you've got it right?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, what we heard from people across the province is that, you know, generally Albertans believe in accountability, they believe in transparency, and they believe that our local governments are extremely important in providing the services to Albertans. We are attempting to level the playing field so that all municipal candidates across the province are governed by the same rules. Now, we are hearing from Albertans who are asking us to move forward with these particular initiatives, and I would dare say that the vast majority of people who talk about it want to see limits placed on such things as election spending.

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

Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the current economic situation some Albertans are worried about the status of our government's savings. Albertans are seeing their savings dwindle during this recession, and it seems there is no plan. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: to what extent has the global recession diminished our savings in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund during the fiscal year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Hays is very justified in his concerns about the heritage savings trust fund. It's one of the centrepieces of our party, put in place by the founder of our modern party, Premier Peter Lougheed. Did we lose money last year because of what happened in the markets? Yes. But the good news, if you look at the third-quarter report that was tabled the same day as the budget, is that this year we're projecting a \$2 billion increase – a \$2 billion increase – in the value of the heritage savings trust fund.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. The Canadian dollar is gaining in value. Is this having any impact on our investment strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The change in the currency value for the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar has both positive and negative effects. The negative effects are that a lot of the heritage trust fund is invested in U.S. securities, so if the U.S.

dollar gets weaker vis-à-vis the Canadian dollar, that decreases our value there; also, most of our exported oil and gas is purchased in U.S. dollars, so again when the Canadian dollar goes up, those U.S. dollars are worth less to us when they come in.

That's the bad news. The good news is that the rising value of the Canadian dollar signals the rest of the world's confidence in the Canadian economy and the Canadian financial system. This country is better situated than other countries to recover from the recession, and Alberta is the best situated of all the provinces.

2:10

Mr. Johnston: My final supplemental to the same minister: are there any plans to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund this fiscal year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inflation-proofing of the trust fund is done as a matter of course under normal times. Last year because the fund lost value, there was no inflation-proofing. This year because there is no inflation projected, there is no inflation-proofing. But for budget 2010-11 \$300 million is allocated for inflation-proofing and to protect the value of that money.

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

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the deplorable state of Edmonton's Remand Centre was highlighted in the legal decision *Trang versus Alberta, Edmonton Remand Centre*. Clearly the commentary contained in this legal decision is a black mark on justice in Alberta. To the Solicitor General. This Queen's Bench decision noted the inhumane conditions in Edmonton's Remand Centre amounted to Charter of Rights and Freedoms violations. Accordingly, what is the Sol Gen doing to rectify these ongoing and persistent violations at the facility?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision is not a black mark on justice in Alberta. It's certainly a cause for concern in the operation of our corrections facility, namely the Edmonton Remand Centre, but it is not a black mark on justice in Alberta. I don't accept that preamble at all.

Mr. Hehr: Black mark, cause for concern: tomayto, tomahto.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta court noted that a major problem in Edmonton's Remand Centre was overcrowding, overcrowding that still exists today. Given that the new remand centre is not to be finished until 2012, what interim measures are being introduced to address these issues?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision in question is still, in fact, before the courts, and Alberta at this point has not decided whether or not to appeal the decision. However, I can tell the member that we have taken steps to resolve most of the issues in the judgment, and we'll continue to work on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what the Solicitor General says, we all know here that there are 800 inmates in the Edmonton Remand Centre at night. Really, that place is supposed to hold 500. What is he doing besides telling the House

one thing when another situation exists? What is he really doing to rectify this ongoing Charter violation?

Mr. Oberle: I am and my department is working on resolving the issues within the Edmonton Remand Centre, and we're quite busy constructing a new one if the hon. member would care to go for a little drive, Mr. Speaker.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has been criticized for spending \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage when we're using the sustainability fund to balance the budget. My question to the Minister of Energy: why can't we eliminate the plan and save some money?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think we need to look at this as an investment and not an expenditure. It's an investment because not only does it help us meet our environmental challenges, but it will be an important element in extracting oil in the future but, most importantly, I would say long term the opportunity to sell the technology globally. One thing that I think we have to make clear is that unlike some parties who believe that this \$2 billion investment over the next 15 years is not good for Alberta, we happen to believe it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question for the same minister. Some people say that CCS is an unproven technology that never has been used effectively. Are we spending money on something that may not work?

Mr. Liepert: Well, in fact, it has proven to work in smaller scale projects throughout the province over the last 20 years. But, you know, there is a major project that has been under way in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, for a number of years – I think it's some 10 years now – where they've injected successfully some 13 million tonnes of CO₂. Again, it's just part of our diversification initiatives, and it will be a success.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Energy. Despite everything that we're doing, a lot of environmental group and political opponents continue to criticize this province for contributing to global warming through the oil sands. Are we a major obstacle to reducing greenhouse gases?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, it's important to get the truth out, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands really, I think, produce about one-tenth of 1 per cent of all the global greenhouse gases. You know, as an example, the oil sands are responsible for about 5 per cent of Canada's overall greenhouse gases whereas the transportation sector is about 25 per cent. So my guess is that on any given day there's more greenhouse gas from the tailpipes of vehicles on the streets of Montreal and Toronto than there is out of the oil sands.

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

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, meeting climate change goals is more than carbon capture and storage. It must include energy efficiency measures. The province is partnering with the feds through EcoEnergy to offer rebates to home and condo owners on boilers, hot water, and insulation, but the feds will also cover windows. Given that the purpose of rebates is to incent people to make improvement they wouldn't otherwise make and that windows are responsible for up to 50 per cent loss of energy efficiency, not including them is a big error. To the Minister of Environment: has the government moved any closer to funding window replacement as part of the energy efficiency rebate program?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the consumer rebate program has been up and in operation for some time now. Unfortunately, it does not include windows. I can't advise the member of anything different than that. It's a matter of getting the maximum amount of efficiency out of a limited amount of dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Although they meet the under-three-storeys requirement, most three-floor walk-ups are not eligible because they're rental units. Why doesn't the government include these under the rebate program?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue around rental units is a good one. I, frankly, would welcome some feedback and some suggestions from the opposition on how we might deal with that because in most rental units it is up to the tenant to pay for the cost of utilities. There's really no incentive even if there is a consumer rebate in the hands of the owner of the building. So it's necessary to try to point the rebate to the person who has the responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister is exactly right. The individual renter has to pay the utilities but has no control over the energy efficiency of the building. That goes to the apartment owner, and they have no incentive to do anything because they're not paying the utilities. My recommendation to the minister: will he consider creating a special category for these kinds of rental buildings?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to create a special category, but as I just enunciated and the member confirmed, a category is not what's needed. What is needed here is being able to target the funds to the individuals that have control over making the decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Health System Utilization Review

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health has talked about a cost-benefit review of public versus private facilities doing certain medical procedures. We can have a debate about this in the House, but if the review is done properly, then the numbers won't lie. My question is to the Minister of Health. When did the cost-benefit review begin? Was it after he came to this portfolio, or was it started by the previous health minister? When will it be completed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge costings have been done off and on throughout the time that the former minister was there and the former minister before the former minister. It's just ongoing. What I specifically asked for was to add the word "benefit" to the word "cost" so that we would know not only the cost, but we'd also know more about the benefits. Some of that might have to do with convenience or distance or wait times. There are a number of other things to be considered in answering that question.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the government is now talking about activity-based funding. It's nice to see that after five years of our party promoting activity-based funding, someone on the government side has finally come around to the Wildrose way of thinking. Proper utilization is also important, and that is a priority this government has missed. We need to know the capacity of our operating rooms and diagnostic equipment in order to address the wait times. Will the minister launch a full system utilization review?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're constantly reviewing things. We're constantly making improvements. As for whose idea it was, it matters not to me whose idea it was. If it was theirs, good for them. If it was ours, which I suspect it might well have been, then good for us. The point is: if it's a good idea, we'll do it.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he missed the question. That was the preamble.

We need a full system utilization review to know if, in fact, our facilities are being utilized properly. We also need a labour review to see if we have the labour to utilize those facilities. Will the minister launch a full system utilization review to know if we're using our equipment to the best?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I said that we do reviews all the time, so I thought I'd sort of addressed that. But we're going to be doing more. For example, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is about to engage in a province-wide blueprint for action, that will be determined by the end of September, that will culminate in the Alberta health care act. That's the type of consultation, input, and ongoing engagement Albertans want, and that's what they're going to get. There'll be more of that going on in the future. There's some good, effective evidence to show that evidence-based decision-making works, and that's what we're pursuing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Environmental Regulations

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have always been very, very protective of their environment, the pristine environment that we have in the province, and that's why the Lougheed administration put in place the first environment department in Canada. It's also why in the Getty administration, as they were going through the whole exercise, the minister of environmental protection, the Hon. Ralph Klein, introduced and passed the most comprehensive environmental legislation in the country, that being, of course, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Now, of course, we're still under attack from outside the province. To the minister of environmental protection: do you see any connection between the volume of regulations and the protection and enhancement of the environment?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there certainly is a relationship between the number of regulations and the protection of the environment, but sometimes, frankly, the regulations can get in the way of protecting the environment. That's why we're committed to streamlining the process. But let me be very, very clear. Streamlining the process has absolutely nothing to do with reducing our very strict standards. We will hold industry accountable, and we'll do so under a streamlined process.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear that, but I'm curious why it is that we continue to add regulations if, in fact, there's another way of doing it. I would encourage the minister to give us examples where, in fact, we can do it in a different manner.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think there are a couple of examples that I'd like to give if I have time. First of all, on the innovative side. Right now if a company wants to use waste heat to produce electricity, the regulations that we have require them to have a separate approval for each facility along the line. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense. The other is to reduce a number of redundancies where we have duplicate processes in place. Once is enough.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really curious how you're going to incorporate the new technologies into helping to reduce the number of regulations.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess as the Minister of Environment challenge is something that we welcome with open arms, and this will be yet another one. I'm not for a moment suggesting that it will be easy. I'm not for a moment suggesting that it's not complex. What I am suggesting is that it's absolutely critical that we do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Assessing Supports for PDD Clients

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this year's budget debate for Seniors and Community Supports the minister stated that over the next three years all of the 9,200 people supported by Persons with Developmental Disabilities will be reassessed using the supports intensity scale, SIS, to determine how much support they receive. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what will be the total cost of performing the reassessment of PDD individuals, and will this be coming from the department's budget or from the PDD community boards' budget?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the cost of implementing the SIS supports assessment tool is very minimal. We did have to hire four people, but they're hired temporarily to help us get through the next few years in the assessment process. The cost of the assessment will come from the PDD budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister explain where the supports intensity scale came from and what the cost is of purchasing it and using it?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the cost for the SIS supports – the software that we have and the computer, the training, all of that – is very minimal. We did purchase it; I'm not sure what the name of the company is. The reason we purchased the SIS assessment tool is because it's a very well-researched program. It's used in 23 different states, and it's used in two other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I guess my point on that question was that I believe it's American.

Will the minister inform the House how the level of PDD supports was determined before SIS and whether there's an evaluation process to track the difference between the new SIS and the previous method?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once a person is determined to be eligible for PDD, there is an assessment process. We have six different regional community boards, and the evaluations they use have evolved throughout the years. They're not necessarily the same, and they're not necessarily consistent. We felt that it was very important that each individual in Alberta is assessed in a very consistent way, so we have a process now where somebody in Grande Prairie or a person with similar disabilities in Lethbridge can be assessed equally and fairly through the same system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

School Class Sizes and Utilization

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After doing a little bit of research, it came to my attention that from 2004 until 2009 there was an increase of 3,300 teachers in Alberta's school system, but there was only an increase of 12,000 students. That represents a 10.5 per cent increase in the number of teachers, but the student population only went up by 1.4 per cent. To the Minister of Education: what would drive such a huge increase in the teacher population relative to a small growth in the student population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a very clear answer to that, the class size initiative. We've hired almost 3,000 teachers in order to meet the class size policy that was put in place after the ACOL report, Alberta's Commission on Learning. Almost all of those teachers that you're talking about are in response to meeting the class size initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cities like Las Vegas have realized that an exceptional growth in their student population warranted more schools, but they also realized that they did not have the budget to build or maintain those needed schools. To better utilize taxpayers' dollars, they've opted to educate students in shifts and run year-round schooling to better utilize the space they have. Our school buildings, new or old, sit empty for a third of the year and half the afternoon and evening. To the minister: have you considered adopting some of those well-developed methods to better utilize the school space that we currently have so that Education dollars go to educating students rather than to buildings and maintenance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there are a number of situations around the province where school boards have put in place programs either to do year-round schooling or to extend the school day, in some cases even considering whether double-shifting might be possible, to use the school on two different school days within one date, so to speak. Of course, there are always the issues of change management, which have to be dealt with. We've become used to the concept that we go to school for certain months of the year and for certain times of the day, but that really, clearly, has to change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spend a lot of money building, running, and maintaining school buildings. I think the minister has picked up from my previous question that I have concerns about how we focus our expectations and performance requirements usually on the building rather than on outcomes. To the Minister of Education: do you have plans in place to help with that change management that will refocus our attention to the fact that our province's future rests on well-educated children, not on whether a community or neighbourhood has an attractive building to stand in?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm firmly of the opinion that public buildings should be attractive and should be the hub of the community and should be a place that we can be proud of.

The hon. member is absolutely right. As we go through the Inspiring Education process, talking about what kind of education we need to be successful in the future, we also have to look at our physical platforms and say: are the schools that we have performing the function that we need? There would have to be a lot of review on what an education facility looks like while recognizing that we have those facilities; they're important to communities in terms of libraries, gymnasiums, and the other things that are essential.

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

2:30

Northland School Division

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government disbanded the board of trustees of the Northland school division last month. Since then Albertans have been learning more and more about the social and economic challenges facing residents of Northland. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given that the challenges facing Northland were beyond the capacity of the trustees alone to address, would you please describe the efforts your ministry has made to involve other ministries such as children's, Aboriginal Relations, and employment to support the work of the board of trustees, and will the minister table evidence of this previous . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with Health and Wellness, with Children's Services, with Aboriginal Relations, and with other ministries to make sure that we don't operate in a silo whether it's in the Northland school division or any other school division in the province. The absolute ability for us to co-operate in

the interest of children is one of our primary purposes. The first phone calls I made after the changes to cabinet were to the Minister of Health and Wellness and to the Minister of Children's Services, talking about the need for us to continue our collaborative processes supporting children in the education process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Part of the question that you may have missed was the tabling of those initiatives prior to the disbanding of the Northland school board.

Given that the previous efforts of the trustees and the government did not succeed in producing acceptable academic results in Northland, what new resources and supports is the government placing at the disposal of the official trustee appointed last month?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very prudent not to give people answers while you're still asking the questions. We have a review team in place that's visiting each and every one of the communities involved in Northland, talking with the families in the communities, talking with the educators in those communities, working with the official trustee. Rushing in with a dump truck load of programs before we've asked all the questions and analyzed what we can best do to create the community engagement, the community value for education that's so necessary to succeed I think would be imprudent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This problem has existed for over 20 years. The government took very dramatic action, blaming the trustees. It would be nice to know what some of the remedies are.

Finally, when the inquiries committee's six-month deadline is up, will the minister release the report to the public immediately along with a timeline for acting on the committee's recommendations?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I take offence to the idea that anybody blamed the trustees. I was very clear that I wasn't blaming trustees. What we were looking for was another way to deal with a very, very important issue so that the children could be put first and we could find a way to move forward with results for the children. The trustees that were involved are still in place, as a matter of fact, as chairmen of their local councils, to which they're elected. We still hope that they will participate in this process. It's not about the trustees; it's about the children. We'll focus on that and make sure that we get it right.

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

Payday Loans

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Payday loan companies seem to be growing rapidly in our province. In this challenging economy many Albertans are struggling to make ends meet and might turn to these high-cost lenders to help pay the bills. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. What are you doing to protect people who borrow from payday lenders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year I introduced the payday loans regulation that established strong, clear rules for

the lenders. One of the measures is that it caps \$23 per \$100 for the amount of money borrowed. The federal government had to approve the maximum amount before it became effective. We recently received that approval, and effective March 1 that's the cap that will be in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Capping the cost of loans is certainly a good step, but what are you doing to help Albertans to stay out of this vicious cycle of borrowing at such a high cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cap is, indeed, only one part of it. The other areas that are excluded are that there are no longer rollovers and discounting. That is when the lender withholds part of the loan, and often consumers receive less than they thought they were getting. It's about giving the consumers the right information to make better choices.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how is the minister making sure Albertans know their rights when they borrow from payday lenders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the best ways to protect consumers is to ensure that they know their rights when they do go into a payday loan business. One of things that will happen on March 1 is that all of this rate will have to be posted on the walls or on the windows. As well, we have a tipsheet. We also have what's called a payday loan calculator, so a consumer can go on the Service Alberta website and actually see what they're getting into when they do need to take one of these loans.

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

Postsecondary Education Ancillary Fees

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's university students are currently charged an average of almost \$1,000 a year in unregulated extra student fees, the highest of such fees in the country. Students and families can't budget for education when schools are allowed to increase fees in this arbitrary and excessive way. To the minister of advanced education: why won't the minister follow the leads of provinces like Manitoba and Ontario and start regulating these auxiliary fees?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed we are working with our student associations to ensure that we have an affordability framework for postsecondary education for all students and all institutions. I'm aware of a couple of institutions in the province right now that are floating proposals of ancillary fees. We're continuing to monitor that, and we'll report back.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need more than monitoring. As the minister mentions, the University of Calgary is now considering plans to copy the U of A's move to raise unregulated student fees by

another \$500. Add that to tuition, and postsecondary education in this province is right back to being the most expensive in Canada. Why won't the minister of advanced education regulate these school fees, respect the tuition cap, and stop creating barriers to education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are respecting the tuition cap. I've said in this House that the cap is near about 1.5 per cent this year. We're respecting that cap. She also mentioned in her preamble that these are considerations and proposals. It's hypothetical at this point.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on one hand universities are looking at what is, in effect, a 10 per cent tuition increase. At the same time they're asking for huge, expensive exceptions to the tuition cap in certain programs. This will mean that fewer Albertan kids can afford education. Why won't government start focusing on access by saying no to both these increases and adequately funding institutions so they stop going after students for the money they need?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the students and the taxpayers in society are the clients of these institutions. Obviously, we're going to make sure that we keep them focused on what they need to do, and that's affordability, that's access, and that's quality. All of the things that the hon. member has mentioned are proposals at this point in time. We'll see what happens when they come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Registered Nursing Graduates

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nurses in this province are a critical part of our health care system. If I'm in the hospital, I want an RN to assess me properly, identify what my nursing care needs are, get me healthy, and get me home. Nurses who are currently in school are coming to me with their concerns over having a job in Alberta when they graduate. My question is to the minister of health. How many nurses are graduating this spring, and what percentage will have a job here in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I expect several hundred are probably graduating. I don't have the exact number, but I'm sure we can find it for her. On average I think about 70 per cent, that I last heard, of our Alberta graduating nurses were finding employment with Alberta Health and Wellness or with Alberta Health Services or some related function that we're responsible for. There are other jobs for nurses such as in private facilities and such as in laboratories and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In August of 2009 Alberta Health Services hired only 40 per cent of the registered nurses who graduated that month. British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have benefited from Alberta nurses leaving Alberta to find work. My question is to the same minister. What is this minister doing to ensure that nurses who are graduating can find work here in our province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm in fact meeting with the United Nurses of Alberta. I've met with them already once, maybe twice, and we're meeting again on Wednesday to address this very

issue. I've also met with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, CARNA, and addressed the same issue with them. I've met with the health sciences folks, who look after the training aspects to a large degree, or at least the program development. I'm doing everything I can to speak and meet with nurses and find out what some of their ideas and solutions are as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the announcement last week to address wait times in surgery and the shortage of home care, can the minister of health tell us if a long-term health plan will also include more home care for patients when they leave the hospital?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I believe that is the plan, Mr. Speaker. Home care is a critical part of the way that we help deliver services and extended services and follow-up services to Albertans in need. Without home care a lot of our folks would not be back at their jobs as fast as they would be, they wouldn't be back on their two feet, as the expression goes, as quickly as we would like them to be, and a lot of general improvements otherwise would not be occurring. But we are confident that they are now, and I'm quite sure that home services will be increased in the next tranche.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:40 Property Assessment Appeals Training

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs with respect to the new property assessment complaints system that the province has adopted and that went into effect at the beginning of this year. Can the minister explain why appeal board members and assessment review board clerks need enhanced mandatory training?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of January 1 there is only one level of assessment appeal with three separate boards to hear different types of property assessment complaints. We have implemented a mandatory training component to ensure that those hearings are accountable, that they are done in an effective, efficient, and timely manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the same minister. Who is responsible for the cost of this enhanced training for these appeal board members?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government is covering the cost of training materials, the instructors, and meals during the training sessions, but the municipalities are responsible for the incidental travel costs that are involved. I want to be clear that training to ensure competent education is very essential, and that's because a lot of those decisions could eventually be appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister, has to do with the locations of these training sessions. Are these training sessions held in each municipality across the province?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, presently these sessions are being held or have been held in five central locations across the province, and that's in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie. Now, we've had several hundred people trained in 41 different sessions, and we are trying to minimize the cost to municipalities and are prepared to look at maybe other municipalities or other locations for training.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 19 different members were recognized today. That was 114 questions and responses. Of the 19 members 13 came from the various opposition parties and six from private government members.

We will continue with the Routine and members' statements in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

National Flag of Canada Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A symbol of Canada that is known around the world is our flag. The Maple Leaf flag officially became Canada's flag on February 15, 1965, during Hon. Lester B. Pearson's time as a Canadian Prime Minister.

Our government thought that Canada needed a flag that was different from the Red Ensign. The Red Ensign had flown throughout our country for many years and showed our ties to Britain. There were many different designs that people wanted for the flag before the present flag was chosen. On December 15, 1964, a motion to adopt a national flag for Canada passed the House of Commons. The Senate of Canada approved the motion on December 17, 1964.

Mr. Speaker, since I moved to Canada in 1979, the Canadian flag has been a very important part of my life. I have placed the Canadian flag in both my house here in Edmonton and my native home in Punjab, India. I am so proud as a Canadian when I see the flag each and every morning. When I see the flag, I remember the troops who have fought for our country for freedom in the past and those who are still fighting today. I urge all Canadians to place the flag in their homes and businesses to show their pride in this great country of ours. Canada has been a great home for me and my family and will continue to be a great home for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Culturally Diverse Health Services

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second national transcultural conference, Multiple Voices for Enhancing Health Equity through Research, Policy, Education, and Clinical Practice, to be held in Calgary in the spring of 2010, is hosted by the child and women's health diversity program in collaboration with a number of stakeholders in Calgary and southern Alberta. Some people may question why such a conference is needed. Well, according to the organizers, while many parts of our country, including Alberta, are working to create more effective multicultural or inclusive health

policies and practices, gaps in services exist. There is a need to share experiences when working with others to begin to identify national standards in the field.

The upcoming national transcultural conference has the following four objectives: examining current and emerging practices and strategies that are used to make health care institutions culturally viable; assessing the essential role of evidence-based research in the development of future transcultural diversity practices and policies; developing cultural competency, knowledge, and skills in health service delivery to reduce inequity in health care; and bringing together policy-makers, health care professionals, administrators, educators, and community representatives from across Canada to discuss cultural competency in a broader spectrum collectively.

Organizers believe that improving culturally and linguistically appropriate services will ensure that children and their families will access services at a level closer to their Canadian-born counterparts. One of the benefits of this change is improved health prevention, which will help to reduce the long-term burden on the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, a culturally competent system is one that possesses a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution to effectively work with and serve a diverse community. These knowledge and skills are transferable to address issues of age, gender, ability, class, and other issues of diversity. Developing cultural competency will benefit our institution's overall capacity to serve our changing demographics in measurable ways in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the crown jewels in Calgary-Lougheed is Fish Creek provincial park. Like so many others from our constituency and around the world, I'm always spellbound by the beauty of the great outdoors. But during a recent visit I was also mesmerized by the great indoors at the newly, extensively renovated Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre. It all adds up to a greener centre for all Albertans, which is even more connected to its environment than before. The project replaces dated construction materials and increases overall space while maintaining the look and feel of the original building.

It serves as a model of sustainable and innovative construction through progressive technologies in design, including Skyfold walls that provide convertible classroom and presentation spaces; Nana doors, which open rooms to the outdoor environment; high-efficiency heating, cooling, and water fixtures; a green roof upon which plants replace shingles; new educational technologies such as video conferencing; a celebration of each of Alberta's six natural regions and the plant and animal species found in them; and vibrant expressions of art courtesy of local students and artists.

School programming is already under way and, again, offers curriculum-based programs modelled on research, best practices, and a dedication to connecting students with their environment. Mr. Speaker, over 800,000 students, teachers, and volunteers have enjoyed award-winning programming at this important Calgary facility since 1982, myself included. I trust that all members of this House will join me in thanking and congratulating all involved as they celebrate the grand reopening of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions that have been received for Private Bills under Standing Order 98(2):

- (1) the petition of the Lethbridge Community Foundation for the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act;
- (2) the petition of the Calgary Olympic Development Association for the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010; and
- (3) the petition of the board of management of the Lamont health care centre for the Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill is part of our government's response to strengthen the emergency management system across our province. This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations while they're providing emergency rescue services under the act. Alberta's search and rescue workers contribute greatly to the safety and security of our communities.

Another amendment will focus on the language of the act to change the current negligence standard for providing emergency services to one of good faith. This matches the language found in the Municipal Government Act. This will provide additional legal defences to the minister, local authorities, and their agents and will help limit their exposure to lawsuits.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, changes to the act will focus on regional emergency service delivery and will allow communities to work together. This administrative process will help with the financial and the training burden that's placed on municipalities today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010, be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail that I received from a constituent, Milena Laban. This constituent is urging funding not to be cut to public schools.

The second tabling I have is from a constituent also, Grace Parr on 67A Street. This is an e-mail correspondence to the former Minister of Health and Wellness. It is regarding funding cuts to PDD service providers.

Thank you.

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 several news releases and articles related to 10 upgrader expansions in the United States. The articles state that the projects will be upgrading Alberta bitumen. My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to these projects in his questions earlier today.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2007-2008.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2008-2009 and the Alberta Vital Statistics annual review 2008.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, now, if I can have the attention of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, I will deal with an issue that I gave notice of. I said I would be recognizing at this point in time the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, who wants to ask for the unanimous consent of the House.

The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request unanimous consent of the Assembly to change Motions Other than Government Motion 503 to 505 and 505 to 503. I have consulted with the Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

The Speaker: It's okay. There's no debate required in this. You need unanimous consent. I'm going to ask one question. Is any member opposed? If so, say no. Okay. Done.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 201

Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. member – I will call on the hon. member; he'll be the first speaker to move this bill – nine members have also indicated their desire to participate. I will outline those remaining eight after the hon. member has moved his bill.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and open debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. Bill 201 is an important piece of legislation and would require two cancers, primary site esophageal and primary site testicular, to be added to this province's list of presumptive cancers for firefighters.

Presumptive legislation can be seen all across Canada. In fact, Alberta was one of the first to introduce such legislation in 2003. The Workers' Compensation Act was amended in 2003 and states, in essence, that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a cancer where the primary site is among the lists in presumptive legislation, the illness shall be presumed to be an occupational disease. Without presumptive legislation the onus would fall on the firefighter to prove that their cancer was caused from their occupation and all too often be required to specify and prove at exactly which fire the cancer took hold, a daunting and impossible task, Mr. Speaker.

In simple terms, a firefighter's work environment can be the cause of the cancer development. This government has recognized this, and as a result eight cancers are currently listed in regulation as presumptive. These cancers include bladder, urethra, kidney, colorectal, and lung for nonsmokers, as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Mr. Speaker, as stated, these cancers are listed in regulation, and as such this bill would require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to amend this regulation to include primary site esophageal and testicular cancer.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 201 builds on what this government has already achieved to protect our firefighters; however, advances in medical science are giving us new information in regard to cancer and its causes. All around North America in the last five to 10 years there has been an increasing amount of long-service firefighters and veterans being diagnosed with cancer. According to the International Association of Fire Fighters there are approximately 10 firefighters that lose their lives annually as a result of job-related cancers in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, many have attributed the increase in cancers to the greater use of synthetics in building materials. The risk is not necessarily from the inhalation of fumes; rather, it's absorption of these dangerous chemicals through the skin. Just to illustrate this, I know that several members in this Assembly today participated last fall in the MLA firefighter for a day event. One of my colleagues who participated in that event commented that the smell of smoke permeated his skin despite the protective gear that he donned and that even after three showers that odour was still present. This is despite the exceptional advances that have been made in the protective gear worn by our firefighters. This exemplifies to me the risk that firefighters are faced with each day.

Firefighters are typically some of the healthiest people around. In fact, it is a job requirement that they be fit. This is why any spike in cancer is abnormal. Cancer is a devastating disease, and I believe that by passing Bill 201, we can provide comfort in a time of uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, last year Edmonton lost two of its finest to cancer, all in the course of two weeks. In fact, it was the sixth in the span of a few years, an all too stark reality that reminded firefighters of the hidden dangers in their jobs. One of these individuals was Captain Bob Chalmers, who passed away last July from leukemia. May he rest in peace. He was a 35-year veteran of the Edmonton fire department and, sadly, only 60 years young. I'm very pleased to add that as a result of this Assembly's work in 2003 Captain Chalmers was able to receive benefits while undergoing treatment for his cancer. While fighting his six-year battle with the disease, and in

typical fashion of the many men and women like those in our gallery today, he stated that he would not hesitate again to devote his life to firefighting.

3:00

The other hero we lost was Captain Alex "Rainbow" Harris, and I mentioned that his wife and son were here, Mr. Speaker. He was 53 years old. Mr. Harris passed away from esophageal cancer. However, as he was unable to pinpoint the exact fire where the cancer took hold, his claim was denied.

This is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker, two firefighters who devoted their lives to their community in similar fashion and who were treated differently by the rules.

In Calgary, of the 21 members of the Calgary fire department lost since 1923, 12 of those have been from cancer. This includes Captain Ed Briggs, who passed away from leukemia in 2004.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, in all reality, is not so much for the firefighter as it is for their families, families who, when cancer strikes, drop everything to fight this disease alongside their loved one. Families face additional emotional stress as they battle for their loved one's life. Without workers' compensation these families are often faced with considerable financial stress.

I believe that each of us in the Assembly has met or knows a firefighter and has seen the immense impact that they have in our communities. These brave men and women put their lives on the line every day to protect Albertans, and we thank you for that. Firefighters do more than just fight fires. They attend medical emergencies, chemical spills, aid in natural disasters, and provide educational tools to the community.

The firefighters of this province have been very instrumental in having esophageal and testicular cancers added to the presumptive list of cancers that are currently listed in the legislation. They have been advocating government for these changes for several years. By adding the aforementioned cancers, we are giving firefighters peace of mind, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank all the Alberta firefighters for their dedication to the people of this province and the many who are here with us today who have been instrumental in this fight. Many of these cancers are often silent, discovered too late. Let us not be silent anymore on this issue. Firefighters fight to protect us; we should fight to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, it is a small measure that this Legislature can do by passing this legislation to attempt – and I stress, attempt – to repay the tremendous debt that the people of Alberta owe to these dedicated men and women who are so instrumental in the safety of all of our citizens. I look forward to further debate on the bill, and I pledge my support to firefighters with this bill.

I would move second reading, and I would humbly ask all hon. members to support passage of Bill 201.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I too would like to get on the record regarding Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on this amendment. I think it is appreciated not only in this House but across the province in the firefighting community if we could call it that. Certainly, Bill 201 will require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to amend the firefighters' primary site cancer regulation to include esophageal and testicular cancer.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon listed off the other cancers that are recognized as an occupational hazard or an occupational disease, and this is, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, not the last time we will be looking at an amendment in this House. I suspect, as research will hopefully prove me correct, that we're just beginning to understand the consequences of this very, very hazardous occupation for firefighters.

Firefighters have no idea when they report to work exactly what they're going to face, Mr. Speaker. In the course of their shift anything could happen. It could be a chemical spill as a result of a truck accident. It could be any amount of hazardous material that's inadvertently spilled that they are responding to. There are fires not only in residential neighbourhoods but also in commercial and industrial locations that they have to respond to. When we look at some of the materials that are now being used to construct our residential buildings, whether it's the epoxies and the glues that are in OSB, whether it's chemical additives to carpets so they don't mould, so they don't catch on fire, there are any number of exposures that a firefighter may encounter. Bill 201 is certainly further direction from the previous legislation, and I would encourage all hon. members to support this legislation.

Now, there are those that say differently, but surely we must recognize that there is strong scientific consensus that firefighters face a higher risk of developing a long list of cancers. As a result, not only Alberta but a number of other provinces have created presumptive clauses allowing firefighters to claim workers' compensation benefits if they should contract particular types of cancers that are defined in the regulations. The types of cancer that we're hopefully going to add as a result of Bill 201 appear to be within, certainly, the national mainstream. The hon. member is not asking for anything that has not already been discussed and debated in other Legislative Assemblies. British Columbia and Saskatchewan to our knowledge include testicular cancer in their regulations. Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick are examples of provinces that include both testicular and esophageal cancer in their comparative regulations.

Certainly, when we look at this, we realize, again, that Alberta firefighters place themselves at great personal danger for our citizens, and they deserve legal protections that recognize the harm they face almost on a daily basis. I have no problem supporting this amendment, and I again would like to thank the hon. member for his work on this.

Now, I was told that the officials in the Department of Employment and Immigration, the ones that keep their eye on the Workers' Compensation Board and the Workers' Compensation Act, are doing a study to see how other sectors of the workforce are affected by exposure in the workplace to various chemicals or various repetitive activities that may lead to the development of a cancer.

I have requested a number of times that the Department of Employment and Immigration once and for all do a long-term study on the hazards of welding in particular. To my knowledge, if this is proceeding, it's proceeding far too slowly. I would certainly like to see the province and the Department of Employment and Immigration, which oversees the legislation that governs this, have a look at what occupational health and safety laws and regulations need to be changed to ensure that all workers are protected. Firefighters, in my opinion, are a good first step. It's needed. It's necessary.

3:10

The idea of adding additional compensation coverage for all workers if their workplace has caused them to be susceptible to cancer: we need to examine this issue, we need to study this issue, and we need to act. Certainly, when you look at some of the welders

— and I'm going to use that as an example — there are far too many welders at a very young age being affected by throat cancer to start with, and I think we need to look at that. Hopefully, the department that I mentioned earlier is working on that as we speak, and they have yet to make the results of their work public.

Certainly, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a very good bill. It takes protection of firefighters an additional step. I don't think we will stop here. If there is a need for additional protection at a future date, hopefully this Assembly will deal with it straightaway as it's needed.

Again, thank you to the hon. member. I hope this bill receives speedy passage through this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a long list of speakers here. I just want to read it out, and then I will recognize the next member. The next members will be Calgary-North Hill, Calgary-Varsity, Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Hays, Edmonton-Strathcona, Airdrie-Chestermere, Drayton Valley-Calmor, and Cypress-Medicine Hat.

You are next, Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to provide some input to this important piece of legislation. Bill 201 is a great idea, and I know that there's an incredible degree of support for this bill. Bill 201 seeks to broaden the coverage for firefighters against potential hazards of their job, a job that I personally have a great deal of admiration for.

Through prior legislation we have committed to ensuring fair workers' compensation for firefighters for a variety of cancers related to their firefighting. It is an honour, Mr. Speaker, to stand up here because I know it was my predecessor in Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, that brought forward the original piece of legislation.

Today there are new findings indicating that two additional types of cancer, esophageal cancer and testicular cancer, should be included along with the eight types already covered in the legislation. It is fitting, then, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 201 seeks to have those cancers included, following the same logic as put forward by my predecessor in prior legislation.

Firefighters provide an invaluable service, as we all know, and when the time comes, they act selflessly to save others, sometimes at great risk to their own well-being. Our firefighters should not have to be concerned that despite their courage and dedication they may not be compensated fairly if they acquire an illness as a result of their work.

I'd like to provide some background, Mr. Speaker, on the important mechanism that Bill 201 relies on as well as the prior legislation brought forward by my predecessor in 2003, that included the first types of cancer in this legislation. Bill 201 relies on presumptive legislation, as does the legislation currently in force. Presumptive legislation alleviates the burden of proof for the worker, in this case firefighters, for the purposes of workers' compensation. It presumes that if a firefighter acquires an illness potentially related to the hazardous materials he or she may have encountered and has been in the profession for a sufficient length of time, then the illness is a result of the occupational hazards. In the case of firefighters these hazards will primarily consist of toxic substances in a fire, burning chemicals and materials.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that presumptive legislation is not misplaced in its assumptions. There is both statistical and scientific support for the assertion that certain cancers are heavily correlated with a number of hazards faced by firefighters.

I was fortunate to participate in the MLA firefighter for a day that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned earlier, and I can attest that it's very obvious to me just from that very short experience that this is something that's real and is not something that is a myth.

While there is probably a very small chance that some of these cancers are not correlated, I do not doubt at all that in the vast majority of cases there is sufficient cause from an actuarial standpoint to support this legislation. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the burden of proof is definitely difficult in most circumstances, virtually impossible.

Consider smoking, for example, and its association with various types of cancers. There is overwhelming evidence that the toxins in cigarettes cause various cancers, and the messaging from the health community is consistent with this. Essentially, it is accepted as a fact that if every smoker develops certain types of cancers, it is a result of their heavy smoking. Of all the smokers who have been diagnosed with correlated cancers, did none of them acquire the cancer from exposure to something else? Well, maybe. More likely than not a small number acquired the cancer from something else other than smoking, maybe radiation or genetic predisposition, without which they would have never acquired the cancer. But how does one even prove that, Mr. Speaker?

We know that in a vast majority of cases certain toxins cause certain cancers with sufficient exposure. This is entirely true for firefighters, just as it is for smokers, Mr. Speaker, although I'm sure the firefighters have a different attitude towards toxic smoke than most smokers do.

Mr. Speaker, presumptive legislation does not just assume causation. Presumptive legislation infers causation based on extensively studied correlations between two factors, in this case certain cancers and toxic substances in a fire. In circumstances which our firefighters face, fair compensation requires this presumptive legislation. The burden of proof in individual specific cases is just simply not feasible, nor is it fair to treat our firefighters this way.

Mr. Speaker, I wasn't here earlier for the introductions but, you know, I was graciously hosted during our MLA firefighter for a day by an old school buddy of mine, Todd Russell, who is part of the Grande Prairie local 2770. I want to say hi to him. You know, I haven't seen him in a long, long time, and it was great to not only learn about their profession but to catch up with him. I went to elementary school with him and attended high school with him with the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. I think that it's very, very important that we treat Todd and his wife and family and all of his colleagues up in the gallery and that they work with on a day-to-day basis in a way that's fair and respectful to the way that they put their lives on the line every day for us.

Mr. Speaker, I hope I have shed some light on why Bill 201 is so important. It's this reason for relying on presumptive legislation: if these two types of cancers are indeed tied to hazards in firefighting, then I believe it is our duty to include them in the firefighters' coverage. With that, I look forward to further debate.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to give my wholehearted support and that of my colleagues to Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I'd also like to give credit where credit is due to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who, as far as I am concerned, has basically completed the third volume in the trilogy of firefighter protection. As the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill noted, volume one came from a former MLA, Richard Magnus of Calgary-

North Hill. I believe that volume one was contributed to by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs last year with a continuance of firefighter recognition and protection legislation.

3:20

Again following in the footsteps of the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, I have gone to school with, worked with, and played with a number of firefighters over my years. The first significant individual that I'd like to mention is Rob Tomlinson. In 1966 Rob and I were attending Ernest Manning high school. I was upgrading, and he was completing his high school. We worked at Woodward's in the parcel pickup, so I worked with him, and I also went to school with him. In the fall of 1967 I began my university career, which took me towards a bachelor of education. While I was attending university classes, Rob was doing his training as a novice firefighter for the Calgary fire department. Rob's friendship continued throughout the years, and he played a pivotal role at my wedding to my wife, Heather, of going on 41 years. He played the role of best man at our wedding. Rob recently retired as a captain from the Calgary fire department.

I mention Rob because Rob talked to me about some of the tremendous obstacles he fought as a firefighter. One that comes to mind very strongly – and chemicals were involved – was putting out a fire in downtown Calgary at a restaurant called the Beachcomber. Now, the Beachcomber was probably the seventh or eighth name that that location had, and it had several false walls to it. Rob described in great detail crawling along the floor with his mask on and seeing a phone melting off the wall from the intense heat of the fire. So the chemicals that firefighters face are beyond a doubt a serious concern that leads to cancer, and this type of legislation, which does not require proof, is absolutely essential to protect our firefighters, who spend every day protecting us.

Other firefighters who I've had the pleasure of coming into contact with are Keith Hart of the famous Hart wrestling dynasty that Stu Hart founded in the city of Calgary. Keith and I were on opposite ends of propping for the Saracens rugby team. Another firefighter-cum-rugby player that I had the pleasure to associate with and who is also a teacher is Adrian Smith. I played rugby with Adrian on the U of C Stags. Most recently, a firefighter who I've come to know and tremendously respect is Greg McDougall. Greg McDougall was a firefighter for a number of years for the city of Calgary. Greg went through a series of very traumatic experiences, which he also shared with me.

My hope, Mr. Speaker, is that the type of firefighter protection that we're seeing today in Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, will be extended to provide firefighters who are currently on the job as well as those who retire with support for posttraumatic stress syndrome. A number of firefighters, unfortunately, have been driven to suicide because of the stress that they faced on their job. It has led to marital breakup. Anything that we can do to provide treatment for firefighters, whether on the job or when they're forced to leave because of stress, I think is absolutely essential. Right now the federal government has a program that recognizes posttraumatic stress syndrome for our military and also for our RCMP, but no such provincial regulation exists to provide firefighters, municipal police with this kind of counselling and support and likewise.

Another area that I'd like to see this extended to is to first responders in general. While it's the firefighters that put themselves in the most immediate danger in the centre of a burning building or in the centre of a spill, I don't want to leave out the fact that we have also police on the scene and we have paramedics frequently on the scene where these chemicals are very much in the air. The firefighters have the equipment in terms of the gas masks that they put on when they enter the building. In some cases they're almost better

protected in their first response circumstances than policemen who are cordoning off the area or paramedics who are waiting to assist the firefighters as they retrieve the individuals from the hazardous circumstances that they find themselves in.

I would urge the government to extend this legislation to cover first responders as well. I'm sure that firefighters would support the extension to their first responder colleagues of this recognition that today we are affording to firefighters. There's no doubt about the danger they face. They should not be worried as they go into a burning building or clear up a chemical spill as to whether their insurance company will cover their situation and especially in the event of their passing continue to support their spouse and children.

This is a wonderful piece of legislation. As I say, volume three in the firefighters protection trilogy. Again I want to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for following in the footsteps of his predecessors in fighting for firefighters. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to have an opportunity to join in debate on Bill 201. I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his efforts in bringing forward the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. The legislation complements a broader initiative our government has been advancing which focuses on building safe and secure communities. Leading this initiative are those individuals who live and work in Alberta's communities. They know their communities best and what is needed to make them succeed. As a government we need to continue to offer support to our communities and the individuals who help to protect them. Individuals such as firefighters embody the greater qualities of community service.

I also want to acknowledge all the firefighters that are with us this afternoon watching this debate. They are a very strong part of our communities and add to the quality of life in our communities. Professional firefighters in larger centres do their jobs on a daily basis. Smaller communities, such as Lacombe and the area that I live in, often depend on volunteer firefighters for their services. They are also highly trained individuals that serve their communities from time to time. They receive calls at any time of night or day to respond to emergencies of many kinds, often fires but sometimes motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies. Mostly they don't know what they're getting into or what risks may confront them when they leave their homes.

In a past life I was a reeve of the county, and I want to say that I was part of the regional fire service in the Lacombe county that co-operated between the Lacombe county, Lacombe town, and other municipalities within the county. I spent some time with the firefighters there attending their practices and going to meetings with them. I understand the pressures and the dangers that they face in their jobs, and I want to acknowledge that. I also want to say that they are highly trained. We always enjoyed visiting with these firefighters when we would bring them a new piece of equipment like a big ladder truck, tandem tandem, about a million dollars. "You can tell the importance of the boys by the size of their toys," we said, and they appreciated that.

3:30

I want to acknowledge and thank the firefighters that are with us today in our gallery and all the firefighters that serve our communities from day to day. They perform their roles with the bravery and courage their daunting work requires. Our government will ensure that these men and women know that we're behind them. Bill 201

serves this end as it enhances the efforts that have been previously taken by the Alberta government.

Alberta was one of the first provinces to introduce presumptive legislation for firefighters. We've already heard what presumptive legislation is. Our government remains focused on the task of helping our emergency personnel who are on the front line of protecting our communities and assisting Albertans in times of vulnerability. Through enacting this legislation, we would join other jurisdictions in Canada that allow firefighters to claim workers' compensation for esophageal and testicular cancer. Recently Manitoba and New Brunswick added these two forms of cancer to their presumptive list as well. Mr. Speaker, these additions are an acknowledgement of the potential dangers of firefighting.

Comprehensive studies have shown that there is an increased risk of firefighters developing different forms of work-related cancer. The Alberta Workers' Compensation Board statistics indicate that almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths since the year 2000 have been due to cancer. The work of firefighters requires these individuals to respond immediately to emergency scenes that are often complex and dangerous. We want to ensure that firefighters have the best support for whatever repercussions may result from their duties. This is why we took steps before to implement effective workers' compensation benefits. This legislation is an extension of that previous support.

We know that firefighters are often cast into different environments that sometimes pose inexplicit consequences. Smoke from a burning structure can contain numerous toxins that will have lasting effects on all who are exposed to it, but this does not deter firefighters, who are trained to put the safety of those they are rescuing ahead of themselves. In the past we have seen firefighters enter into these situations with the goal of saving lives regardless of the consequences of engaging harmful fires.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've experienced this personally myself. I had a farm – well, I still have a farm – and some years ago a large fire engulfed some of my barns with a lot of animals inside. We phoned the firefighters. They were there within a few minutes – you know, 15 minutes from town – and they just went right into this fire and put it out, saved an enormous amount of property, not human lives at that time but lives of animals. They put their lives on the line. I have been very, very thankful for the help that they provided for myself and my family.

History has demonstrated this time and again. Perhaps the most vivid example is the fire that consumed the World Trade Centre on 9/11. On that day several New York fire departments battled blazes in the Twin Towers in a heroic effort to save lives. It was a time of crisis, and these individuals engaged in the treacherous situation nevertheless, as all firefighters so often do. It is only years later, when the dust settles, that firefighters are faced with the repercussions of putting themselves in harm's way. Mr. Speaker, 9/11, like many serious fires, caused long-term effects to those who were embattled in dowsing the flames. There are now several documented cases of firefighters who have been afflicted with higher than normal rates of cancer directly as a result of fighting those fires. This is an unfortunate reality of firefighting. The work involves taking serious risks.

As a government we'll continue to provide support to comfort and compensate those brave individuals who take on such roles here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is our obligation to create a reasonable legislative framework that will allow these individuals to be compensated for damages suffered through keeping our communities safe. Bill 201 enhances the support for those who work to provide the relief, assistance, and rescue that Albertans need. It's difficult work, but that's what these men and women sign up for.

They never shy away from the hard and sometimes hazardous work their occupation requires. We know that when the call comes, our firefighters will be there. It's the Alberta way.

Through this legislation Alberta will again be leading in providing compensation benefits for our firefighters. In an emergency it's important to stick together and help each other out. That's how strong communities are built and protected. This is how fire departments approach each day together, united in an effort to take on whatever may be ahead of them. They often don't know all the dangers within a burning building, but this does not deter them. They still dutifully enter it as it is their job, and this is what they're trained for.

So when the flames die out and these brave individuals return home, if they are afflicted by illness as a result of their efforts, I believe they should be allowed to apply for compensation. They have demonstrated their resolve to support our communities, and I think it is only fitting that we in turn offer support through these measures as proposed in Bill 201.

With that, I would again like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on Bill 201. It is an important piece of legislation that serves to assist those who help make our communities safe and secure. I'm also encouraged by the support of all members of this Legislature. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be offering my support as well for Bill 201.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House in strong support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As a result of our elected positions, many in this House have had the opportunity to meet with first responders or to watch them work together to help people in a time of great need. For their selfless sacrifice and willingness to help others without hesitation or equivocation, we owe them our thanks and the proper protection against the hazards they experience. This is why I rise in support of this bill and why the entire Wildrose Alliance caucus stands in support of this bill.

Being a firefighter is not a typical job. The people who serve as firefighters are not typical people. I cannot think of many who would willingly rush into a burning building to save someone's pet or, more importantly, to risk their own life to save another, but they do this, and for this we are eternally grateful, Mr. Speaker. Many years ago we had a devastating fire in our home. From the eyes of a child these big, burly guys racing in and out of your house can be pretty intimidating. We lost everything, but what they did manage to save was really important: my dog and my turtles. From that day forward firefighters have and will always be my heroes.

In the course of their duties we know that they become exposed to materials that even the latest technology, building standards, workplace safety measures, or breathing equipment cannot protect them from. It is for this reason that the former Member for Calgary-North Hill proposed the original bill to help and protect firefighters. I supported the original bill, Mr. Speaker, because it was the right thing to do then, and these are the right things to support now.

Each member of this House could go on and on at length about the work that firefighters and all emergency workers do to protect life, limb, and property, but words will never do true justice to the risks they take, to the pride they feel, or to the care for the people of Alberta communities. Bill 201 is a small way that we can recognize their sacrifices, their willingness to race into the face of danger, and to help us in times of greater need.

My thanks to the sponsor, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I encourage all members to support Bill 201.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to voice my support for Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to start by commending the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward such an important piece of legislation. Bill 201 proposes to strengthen Alberta's commitment to our firefighters by including two additional cancers, primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer, to the list of presumptive cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation.

Alberta firefighters play an integral role in the safety and well-being of our community. Every day they are asked to risk their lives in order to protect us and our property from the devastating effects of fire. In fact, firefighters are the only group of workers that cannot refuse to work due to unsafe conditions. Their jobs require them to risk their lives both in the moment that they are fighting a fire and in the longer term as they face the possibility of cancer.

Unfortunately, in this line of work firefighters are constantly being exposed to large amounts of toxins that are produced as a result of burning plastics, chemicals, and building materials. While they do have protective gear that helps to shield them from the harmful effects of these toxins, this equipment is not a hundred per cent effective, and some of the toxins will inevitably be absorbed into the body. Many of these toxins are highly carcinogenic. In fact, almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths in Alberta since 2000 have been due to cancer. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it is impossible to tell when the seeds of cancer have been planted in our firefighters. The latent nature of these diseases means that it could be 20 or 30 years before they are detected, yet there is compelling scientific research which suggests that they are the result of a career spent fighting fires.

3:40

The province already recognizes eight cancers in its presumptive legislation for firefighters' compensation. However, research is showing that this list should be expanded. By including primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer, we can ensure that more Alberta firefighters and their families are adequately compensated for the sacrifices that they have made for our communities. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is as much for the families of these firefighters as it is for the firefighters themselves. As anyone who has been touched by cancer knows, when an individual is diagnosed with cancer, it is their entire family that comes together to fight it.

In the absence of the presumptive legislation that would automatically assume that these cancers are work related, the onus is on the firefighters to prove that their illness is a result of their occupation. Without this legislation Alberta firefighters that are diagnosed with esophageal and primary site testicular cancer would have to file a workers' compensation claim and endure the uncertainties of the claims process. This process of claims and appeals can take years to produce a final decision, and even then there is no guarantee that the claims system will recognize their illness as occupational and award appropriate compensation. Bill 201 would allow these families to focus all of their attention and energy on fighting these diseases rather than on the claims and appeals process of workers' compensation.

Mr. Speaker, the life of a firefighter is one that can sustain substantial amounts of uncertainty, and their families live each day with the possibility that their loved one may not return home at the end of a shift. Even if these firefighters manage to enjoy a long career, they will continuously face the possibility of developing a life-threatening disease as a result of their line of work. Alberta firefighters and their families have made great sacrifices to ensure the safety and well-being of our communities and have taken many risks on our behalf.

Bill 201 would see these families protected from the devastating financial hardships that accompany a battle – primary site esophageal and primary site testicular cancers – allowing them to focus on getting through the daily struggles that these illnesses bring without having to worry about how they'll pay their bills. This legislation will also serve to reach out to those families and show them that Albertans appreciate all that they have done to help keep us safe and support them in their hour of need. At the heart of Bill 201 is respect and compassion for those who have served the people of our province so selflessly. The service of the men and women who bravely enter burning buildings, gladly risking their lives for ours, is quite obvious.

More subtle is the service rendered to the people of Alberta by the families of these firefighters. Each day, like the firefighters themselves, they deal with a great amount of uncertainty. Mr. Speaker, they're also the ones who will take care of our firefighters if they have to battle cancer and are the ones left behind if they lose that fight. For all that these families choose to sacrifice for the benefit of Albertans, I believe Bill 201 will go a long way in continuing to recognize their hardship and contributions.

I would once again like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I wholeheartedly support Bill 201 and urge my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise in order to lend my support and the support of our caucus to this private member's bill. As many, many speakers today have already talked about, we all share a tremendous amount of respect and appreciation for the work and the sacrifice that we see from our firefighters each and every day in all of our communities. These are people that work very, very hard to protect members of the community. Quite frankly, I think it's a very special person who chooses to make their living in the job of putting themselves in danger to protect and assist others. It is, without question, a heroic choice and a heroic type of work that they perform every day.

I have had the benefit to attend the firefighters' memorial service each year, as I'm sure other members of this Assembly have. Every time we attend that memorial, we stop and take time and consider the memory of those firefighters who have died in action. Without question a number of those who die in action are those who have succumbed to some form of cancer, whether it be a form of cancer that's already recognized under this legislation or, now in the future, whether it's a form of cancer which up until the hoped-to-be-soon passing of this legislation was not previously recognized by this piece of legislation. So I think it's very, very important that we add to the list. As one speaker has already pointed out, in so doing, we negate the obligation of that firefighter and/or his family or her family to subject themselves to the workers' compensation system and the challenges that exist in terms of proving the compensability of a particular type of illness or disease.

I have to also say, though, that when I attend those memorials, I am very aware of some of the other common diseases or processes which occur and result in the illness or death or injury of firefighters. There are those who most obviously and most tragically die while in action, and then there are those who succumb to the type of cancers we've identified or we are about to identify, but there are also those who die from heart disease. It's very common that heart disease of different forms will result in either injury or illness or fatality to firefighters; also lung diseases, stress, posttraumatic stress, and other illnesses that arise secondary to the particularly dangerous and hazardous type of work that they engage in.

In short, I believe that there are many firefighters out there who even today suffer from illness or injury, or there are families of people who have suffered from deaths which are not currently recognized under our workers' compensation system. While this bill will assist in identifying and adding to the list the types of cancers which receive presumptive treatment by the Workers' Compensation Board, I believe there is a great deal more work to be done in this regard in terms of understanding the hazards faced by firefighters in their day-to-day work.

I also think that there is another point that needs to be made here. I believe very strongly from my own conversations with many firefighters, particularly in my past life working as an occupational health and safety advocate and working in particular with a number of different professions, including firefighters, that what we know is that firefighters are not the only profession to be subjected to hazards in the workplace which ultimately kill or cause significant illnesses as a result of exposure to those hazards.

As much as we all appreciate and must remember every day the heroic efforts of firefighters, we should also remember that other workers who are exposed in their workplace to chemicals, whether burning chemicals or whether chemicals in the day-to-day handling requirements of their job, also become ill or may in fact die from exposure, and they are not always recognized. There is also the whole question of long-term injury to musculoskeletal parts of the body that, again, are difficult for workers to receive recognition of when dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board.

In short, the Workers' Compensation Board, particularly in Alberta, does not do a good job of recognizing or compensating for occupational disease and illness, and that means that workers in this province go uncompensated for illnesses and, in some cases, deaths that arise as a result of hazards to which they are exposed in their workplace. Almost 10 years ago now Justice Friedman reviewed our WCB system and made a number of recommendations with respect to how we needed to improve it. Although originally the government agreed to adopt those recommendations, they subsequently changed their mind on that decision, and there remain significant substantive flaws in our workers' compensation system in Alberta today. Workers do not have equal access to representation, there are concerns around the way in which medical advice is given within the system, and there is an adjudicative framework which discourages both workers from claiming and adjudicators from recognizing significant numbers of occupational diseases and illnesses within the workplace.

3:50

It is wonderful that everybody here is agreeing that firefighters need to receive compensation for a bit more of the injury and illnesses from which they suffer as a result of the good work that they do on our behalf. I don't at this point believe that we're coming close to recognizing all of those. I also believe that we are failing to understand that the bigger picture is that we have a system which does not fairly compensate our workers for the illnesses and the

injuries that they suffer in their workplaces, which are under our watch. Ultimately, should we choose to deal with that much larger issue, I think we would also be doing a grand thing in memory of those firefighters who have sacrificed themselves on our behalf, and I do believe quite strongly that they would support that call.

I certainly hope that members of this Assembly will give some consideration to that and remember those discussions that we have had in the past about the fact that we have a very problematic workers' compensation system in this province, where a number of independent overseers have looked at it and made recommendations, calling on us to do better for Alberta workers, and that to date we have not responded to those recommendations.

As we happily go about passing this piece of legislation today, let us not forget the many, many other workers, both identified and not identified, who suffer injury, illness, disease, and death at their workplaces every day, every year, some of whom receive compensation, many of whom do not, in a province which, of course, as many people here will know, also suffers from the fact that it is the only province in the country which does not provide workers the capacity to ensure their own safety at their own workplaces as a matter of course. Through that, I'm talking about health and safety committees, which is a matter of law in every other jurisdiction in the country except for this one.

We could do much, much better protecting workers in this province before they become injured. We could do much better protecting firefighters in this province before they become injured, become ill, or succumb to disease, and I think it's important for members of this Assembly to be fully aware of that.

Having said that, I do support the particulars of this legislation. I just believe that there is much, much, much more for us to do if we are going to properly recognize and appreciate the work that is done every day by our firefighters and if we are to properly appreciate and recognize the work done every day by workers in Alberta and to properly to protect their health and their safety from here forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. There's a contingent of people in this province that dedicate their lives to working within emergency services. These people include police officers, paramedics, and firefighters. Daily these individuals put their lives on the line in efforts to ensure the well-being of other Albertans.

For firefighters the risks only begin on the site of a fire. Like they say, where there's smoke, there's fire. But there are also toxins. Despite their best efforts to protect themselves, these toxins make their way into firefighters' bloodstreams. Mr. Speaker, many people would assume that this occurs by inhalation, that these toxins are breathed in. While this is a contributing factor, more recent research has demonstrated that oftentimes these toxins are actually absorbed through the skin. In realizing this, one can begin to understand how vulnerable firefighters actually are as the entire surface area of their bodies can act to admit these toxins into their systems. While science and technology work to improve the protective wear that firefighters use, it remains that firefighters are exposed to more toxins in comparison to the average person.

Some of these toxins are what are called carcinogens, which are cancer-causing agents. Household items that seem benign can in combustion emit these carcinogens. For example, mothballs contain a substance that is a possible human carcinogen. Formaldehyde, a

known human carcinogen, can be released from materials such as particleboard, insulation, and aerosol cans when they are combusted. These are just a few examples. Many other household substances, including things like paint thinner, glues, and plastics, can all emit potentially hazardous and cancerous substances. Mr. Speaker, the ingestion or absorption of these substances eventually leads to the circulation through the body by the bloodstream. They can then impact cells in all organs of the body, causing genetic mutations which can ultimately result in a tumour.

Research in this area has led to the development of presumptive legislation in Alberta and many other jurisdictions. Presumptive legislation ensures that if a firefighter develops a particular type of cancer and has been working with the fire protection service for a prescribed number of years, it is presumed that it is a direct result of their occupation. For example, in Alberta if an individual develops leukemia and has been working as a firefighter for a minimum of five years, it is assumed that the dominant cause of the cancer is a result of their profession as a firefighter and the associated exposure to combustion-related toxins. This permits workers to then claim compensation through the Workers' Compensation Board if as a result of their illness they are unable to work. Currently there are eight cancers in Alberta that fall under presumptive legislation: leukemia; brain cancer; bladder cancer; lung cancer, provided they are nonsmokers; ureter cancer; colorectal cancer; and non-Hodgkin's type lymphoma.

Mr. Speaker, since the passing of presumptive legislation to cover these eight cancers in firefighters, which was in 2003, research has continued to expose trends in the development of cancers in firefighters. More recent studies have begun to demonstrate that in addition to these eight cancers there is an increased occurrence of other types of cancer, specifically testicular and esophageal cancers. For example, a recent study took advantage of the California Cancer Registry, which is one of the largest of its kind in the world as it dates back to 1988 and contains over 1.1 million relevant case files.

The study compared the rates of several types of cancer in men that reported their primary occupation as firefighters to the remainder of the males in the database. This thorough and extensive study concluded that several types of cancer consistently occur more often in firefighters. The list includes several cancers, among them esophageal and testicular, the two cancers that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is working diligently to include under presumptive legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the increased rate of occurrence of both testicular and esophageal cancer in the study that I'm referencing is significant at a 95 per cent confidence interval. Despite this, it is my understanding that some studies show smaller spikes in occurrence of these two cancers. In light of this, some believe that they do not merit being included in the presumptive cancers list. I couldn't disagree more.

Mr. Speaker, research is now telling society that the best method of prevention of all cancers is to lead a healthy lifestyle. This includes being active and eating well. By virtue of their vocation firefighters need to remain fit. Because of this, it is reasonable to conclude that in the absence of the toxins that their profession exposes them to, they would be at a reduced risk for cancer in comparison to the average citizen. Therefore, any spike in the occurrence of this disease is worthy of evaluation in terms of its relatedness to the profession of firefighting. I particularly believe that in light of the studies done on rates of occurrence of esophageal and testicular cancers, being a firefighter predisposes these individuals to their development. As such, like the other eight cancers, they have a higher frequency of occurrence in firefighters. I believe these two should be added under presumptive legislation.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, firefighters are integral to our society. They take risks and face challenges that some of us, fortunately, don't experience in the entirety of our lifetime. They do it to ensure the safety and security of all Albertans, our infrastructure, and, by extension of that, our communities.

Mr. Speaker, these are positions of honour, and it is therefore important that we as a government continue to demonstrate our support for the roles they play. I believe that by responding to the reasoned outcomes of our research community, which indicate an increased prevalence of testicular and esophageal cancer amongst individuals in the firefighting profession, we are continuing to show our appreciation for their hard work and sacrifice.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. I support it fully and urge my hon. colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a list of speakers here. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise in support of Bill 201 and would like to commend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing such a current and relevant piece of legislation forward. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and myself share a common thread in that we both represent communities that have an integrated fire and ambulance service in place. They mean a lot to our communities, and I'll talk about that a little bit later. This is an obvious piece of legislation that needed to be – well, it's not so obvious. If it was so obvious, it would have been done by now. Obviously, the member has done his homework and has been listening to his constituents, and I commend him for that.

Ever since I was a little boy, I was, you know, very much a fan of and looked up to firefighters, like so many people in this Chamber probably did. My uncle Aro Dudley was a Calgary firefighter. We were neighbours of him. I remember being in awe watching the show *Rescue 911*, if you remember that. He was on it, and he had saved some little girl from a fire. I remember very vividly just how proud I was to be related to a real-life hero. When I saw this bill come forward, he was the first person that I thought of. But there are so many stories like that, and there are just so many heroes among our firefighters today.

Section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act, which this amends, specifically alludes to the integrated fire-ambulance services. It specifically says that in these cases this act covers these types of firefighters. I feel that that's really appropriate and a good thing and probably one of the reasons why this member is taking this bill through.

In Airdrie we have, as I said earlier, an integrated fire-ambulance team, EMS service, one that we are very proud of. It has become quite an issue of contention with this government in our community right now because our city council has just chosen to divest themselves of this service because of some happenings with the province.

I want to read an article into the record that was published in the local paper in Airdrie. I'm of the hope that the current minister of health will be able to assist my community in retaining our integrated service and actually reverse what has happened because of some developments with Alberta Health Services. I would like to put that into the record, and I'll do so now. The article is entitled *Airdrie Emergency Services and Broken Promises* and is as follows:

Many residents of Airdrie were disappointed when they heard the news the City would be divesting itself of its provincially renowned integrated fire and ambulance service.

Run by Chief Sheldon Leavitt, Airdrie Emergency Services has a sterling safety record, attracts and trains dozens of highly skilled individuals to Airdrie, and saves millions of taxpayers' dollars by efficiently integrating the use of equipment and personnel thereby limiting duplication and waste.

So why would the City feel the need to divest itself of this service? Two words – broken promises.

As a newly elected MLA, I was approached by [the] then Health Minister . . . to carry Bill 43, the Emergency Health Services Act (2008). The proposed law was to enshrine responsibility for providing ambulance services with the newly created Alberta Health Services (AHS) entity.

I immediately brought up a concern with the Minister, communicated to me by Mayor Linda Bruce shortly after taking office, that Airdrie was worried this centralization of authority might mean the end of our community's prized integrated service. I said that if the minister could guarantee me that this legislation would not interfere with Airdrie's ability to retain its integrated service, I would be happy to carry Bill 43 through the Legislature. The minister made the promise, and I, somewhat naively it turns out, took him at his word.

Roughly one year later, and to my great consternation, I received a phone call from our good mayor explaining that [Alberta Health Services] was alleging that Airdrie Emergency Services was in breach of its contract with AHS, and that the demands being made by AHS were so expensive in nature, the City may be forced to divest itself of its integrated service entirely.

The stated complaint by AHS was that the integrated service was overstretched and not adequately safe. Given the unblemished safety record of the service, I found that difficult to believe. Upon further investigation, it appears a high ranking bureaucrat at [Alberta Health Services] was on a bit of a power trip, and was looking for any excuse to have AHS take over Airdrie's integrated service.

After investigating this issue, I called [the] Minister . . . explained the situation and reminded him of his pledge. I suggested that all he needed to do was rein in one or two bureaucrats at AHS and the problem would be solved. He said he would look into it but that I should not involve myself. He hired a mediator. City managers provided three options they felt would address the stated concerns of AHS. AHS declined each option and stubbornly refused to alter its original position on the issue.

Late last year, [the] Minister . . . called me with the news that mediation had failed, but that he would have communications staff at [Alberta Health Services] call me about spinning the news to my constituents as a "public safety concern." I guess he has control over that part of the bureaucracy. I crossed the floor shortly thereafter.

Now, I've asked the current health minister to meet with the city and the city staff to see if there could be something worked out to keep our integrated service. The minister has very thoughtfully agreed to do that, which I'm very grateful for. There's a lot of hope in our town right now that this sort of nightmare might be over, especially for the staff of the integrated service. If anyone looks at the Airdrie papers for the last couple of weeks, since the minister agreed to that meeting, they'll see that there is a lot of hope that something might be done. I would just ask that the minister – he's not here right now, obviously on other duties, a very busy man – when he hears of this first-hand from the city, will do the right thing and reverse a very damaging decision by Alberta Health Services.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, may I just call on you. This is Bill 201 about firefighter cancers.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I stated earlier, the bill actually specifically addresses the integrated ambulance

service, that is unique to many communities, including Leduc and Airdrie, so it's very, very relevant to the topic.

I will say this in conclusion, that I do support Bill 201 wholeheartedly.

I would conclude with another story by saying that, you know, when I was in New York late last year, I had the opportunity to visit the World Trade Center site. Across from the World Trade Center site is a church.

An Hon. Member: It's still standing.

4:10

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. It's still standing.

They based rescue operations out of that church. Firefighters from all across the world came there and were based out of there when they were going to and coming from. They would sleep right there in the graveyard that's at that church. It really had a special feeling to it, just a really special place.

I noticed that there's a pile of badges; I'd say about four feet tall. It's just a pile of badges from the different fire departments and police departments from around the world that came to serve there. There's a big kind of commemoration to it and a big photograph of it that you can see on every side of the church and then, of course, the badges in the church itself. I noticed to my excitement that the Edmonton fire department has the badge right smack on the very top. The picture just focuses right down on it, and the first thing you see is the Edmonton fire department. You know, I got to thinking about what absolutely amazing people would go all the way across North America to search and help their brethren in distress in the ruins of the World Trade Center. That was a special moment for me personally, and I think all Albertans and Edmontonians should take pride in being recognized that way.

I think Bill 201 is definitely the least that we could do to make sure that just as our friends in the fire departments across this great province are there for us when we need them, we're there for them when they need us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and voice my strong support for Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of men and women in Alberta have chosen career paths knowing that their job description would involve putting themselves in life-threatening situations to protect and rescue others. Firefighting is this career. Firefighters have received medical emergency training, which allows firefighters to perform rescue services and prehospital care in numerous situations.

As a former mayor I know first-hand that these men and women are also very active members of our communities, engaging in several charitable organizations and educating Albertans on fire safety and prevention. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar firefighters are active in different organizations and are certainly in our schools to teach our children the importance of fire safety. These men and women are trained to cope with numerous situations that could endanger lives and damage property, such as motor vehicle accidents and hazardous goods spills.

Mr. Speaker, there aren't many people that go to work every day knowing that they may face potentially life-threatening situations. There are endless terms we can use to describe these men and women. Brave and selfless are two that come to mind. But I believe

there is no better term to describe these firefighters than heroes. Imagine a house or building engulfed in flames. While people are running away from the flames and smoke, firefighters have the instinct to run towards them. They are more concerned about the lives of the people trapped inside than the thick, black smoke and the over 500 degree Celsius temperature that await them.

As I said, rescuing people from burning buildings and extinguishing flames are only part of the firefighter's responsibility at the scene of a fire. Often fire victims have been exposed to large amounts of smoke or other toxic substances. Since this is part of the job, Alberta firefighters are required to receive emergency medical training. This training also allows firefighters to provide prehospital care to fire victims who have burns, who may have suffered from smoke inhalation or other injuries as a result of a fire. Mr. Speaker, prehospital care means the difference between a minor or a serious injury or even between life and death.

As a result of the educational programs in our schools our children know that a house fire can turn deadly in approximately three minutes and that the average response time for a firefighter to respond to a fire is only a few minutes. The time between the detection of a fire and the firefighters' arrival on the scene is very crucial. In light of these facts, firefighters across our province are leading fire prevention and evacuation seminars in our classrooms and in our communities. This increases knowledge about escape routes, reducing the likelihood of a fire and educating our children on how to make smart choices that can save lives.

The Alberta Fire and Injury Prevention Educators' Network is one of many examples of Alberta's firefighters' dedication to reducing both the number and severity of fires in our province. This group of men and women have made fire and injury prevention education a priority for our province's fire emergency services. The network also aims to recognize and close the gap between fire and injury prevention education so that Albertans have the best information possible on fire safety.

Mr. Speaker, firefighters are known for saving lives. We often think about the image of a firefighter carrying someone out, away from the flames, or providing prehospital care that saves lives. While these are the most visible ways of saving a life, I would suggest that firefighters are saving lives every day in our classrooms and our communities teaching Albertans about both fire and injury prevention. This preventative training saves lives in a different way, and Alberta firefighters should be commended for their dedication to public safety.

In addition to our firefighters' commitment to public safety and promotion of fire prevention in our communities, there is another area in which Alberta firefighters display their commitment to our communities. The volunteer work and charitable organizations that our firefighters are involved in is truly phenomenal. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar and, indeed, around the province fire departments have a strong desire to help those affected by fire and to bring smiles to children's faces.

Numerous fire departments raise funds for burn victims to ensure that money is available for necessary upgrades to the highly specialized equipment in their burn unit. This funding often provides the local burn units' health care teams with educational opportunities that allow them to remain informed of new treatment techniques. This provides comfort to those suffering serious burns. Raising funds for burn victims is one of many causes that the Alberta firefighters are associated with. Many fire departments across Alberta organize toy drives for underprivileged youth or raise funds for cancer charities for children.

Mr. Speaker, one of the realities of being a firefighter is going to work knowing that you may endanger yourself to save another's life.

Alberta's firefighters are truly heroes, and it is very difficult to show the depth of our gratitude for what they do. Anyone who has been victimized by a fire knows that there really is no proper way to thank the firemen and women who may have saved your home or a family member. Bill 201 recognizes the role that firefighters play in our society. It also recognizes the dangerous working conditions that firefighters face each and every day. One simple way we can display our respect and admiration for our firefighters is to support Bill 201. Bill 201 acknowledges that the risks associated with being a firefighter do not end once the flames are extinguished.

Spouses and the family members of our firefighters also make sacrifices when their loved ones are called out, and this might happen at supper, at a birthday party, or at any family event. It is a sacrifice that they all make. We also thank the spouses and families for their dedication and sacrifice as well for the support they give to our firemen and women. This bill goes further by thanking our firefighters for the role they play in our communities as lifesavers, educators, and volunteers.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. The wonderful work that he has done, an amazing amount of work, needs to be acknowledged as well. It is my pleasure to support Bill 201 and to thank all those who serve in this noble profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much. Also known as member 709.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. Like the original amendments that were brought forward with respect to firefighters, I am fully in support of this bill. The bill amends the Workers' Compensation Act so that esophageal and testicular cancers will be added to the list of eligible cancers for which firefighters can be compensated.

Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties with our workers' compensation system and the way it is administered is that the onus of proof is very much on the person making the claim that the condition or injury from which they suffer directly arises out their work. So when certain diseases are deemed to be grounds for compensation, this makes that whole process much easier for the person who is making the application. I think that when there is clear evidence that particular diseases or injuries arise out of particular occupations, then we ought to make sure that people are entitled to that compensation.

Now, the Workers' Compensation Board currently recognizes kidney cancer, leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, brain, bladder, colorectal, lung, and uterine cancer. This is based, I think, on an approach that provides a great deal more fairness. If someone is suffering from cancer or other serious illness as a result of their occupation, the last thing they want to be doing is going through the various steps and hoops that are provided for in order to get the claim approved. This, unfortunately, is an all-too-common experience of people who apply in Alberta for workers' compensation. So by adding these two cancers, which designate a primary site esophageal cancer and a primary site testicular cancer, to the list of diseases to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies, that would mean that the applicant would not have to prove the relationship to their employment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all recognize the tremendous courage of our firefighters and the wonderful job they do protecting the lives and property of citizens. But I think that this bill is important for a different reason, and that is that people who are in a hazardous occupation and who are exposed to carcinogenic chemicals or other harmful materials in their environment that result in serious disease or injury have a right to be compensated.

This should apply not only to firefighters, in my view, but should be an underlying principle of workers' compensation in this province. I regret to say that I don't believe that it has been fully accommodated within the current practices of the Workers' Compensation Board or within the legislation that we now have. The principle of this bill is excellent, and I'm saying that it needs to be extended to all workers who face hazardous conditions in their employment and suffer long-term diseases or severe diseases as a result, not just firefighters. Not just because firefighters are brave do we award them with this.

It's important, I think, that we recognize that as human beings, as workers they have the right to compensation, and they have the right to be fairly compensated without having to go through enormous hoops and bureaucratic mazes and the frustration that comes from that. Mr. Speaker, I know, because in my position I've dealt with many people who have been frustrated by workers' compensation in this province, the almost desperate look in their eyes and just their gratitude that somebody will actually sit down and listen to them. Some people, in my view, have become almost obsessed with getting justice because they were denied justice, Mr. Speaker, under our workers' compensation system.

So, in my view, Bill 201 is a wonderful piece of legislation, and I commend the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing it forward, but its principle needs to be extended to other diseases and to other workers. This is something that we should be providing for anyone in our province who has been negatively impacted to the extent that they now have a disease that threatens their life or their livelihood as a result of their occupation. When those diseases can be shown to be caused by their occupation, then there should be deemed to be a sufficient reason for providing the compensation under the act.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, I very much support this bill, but I don't accept the notion that this protection is provided to firefighters by reason of their courage or their standing in the community. It ought to be provided to every worker who is in an occupation where their health and safety can be compromised and it can be shown, reliably, that particular diseases are a result of their occupation and the environment in which they do that job. So I would urge the government to go beyond private members' bills and bring forward some comprehensive legislation that extends this principle to all workers in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I believe that the objective of Bill 201 is to enhance the Alberta Workers' Compensation Act by expanding the presumptive cancer list for firefighters. This is essential because in serving our communities, firefighters respond to emergencies and are exposed to a multitude of known and unknown dangers to their health and well-being.

I commend the province for already having substantial workers' compensation legislation, but Bill 201 would help ensure that this government supports our firefighters to the fullest. Alberta's current presumptive cancer list for firefighters includes brain, bladder, uterine, kidney, colorectal, lung, as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Bill 201 would expand this list to include primary site esophageal cancer as well as primary site testicular cancer. These additions would help ensure that Alberta is in line with other provinces and states that have recently added esophageal and testicular cancer to their lists that presume cancers for firefighters. For instance, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick as well as several jurisdictions in the United States include one or both of these cancers on their presumptive cancer lists.

4:30

I'd like to further discuss these examples of other jurisdictions as they demonstrate that Bill 201 is feasible and beneficial for firefighters. Mr. Speaker, Manitoba and New Brunswick have incorporated both esophageal cancer and testicular cancer in their presumptive cancer list. In 2009 Manitoba amended its Workers Compensation Act to incorporate esophageal and testicular cancers to their list of cancers covered by workers' compensation. The legislation is retroactive to 1992 and ensures that families of firefighters who fall ill or pass away can access money to cover their expenses. This amendment was known as Bill 17 and received royal assent on June 11, 2009. Mr. Speaker, esophageal and testicular cancers can develop in firefighters after regular exposure to harmful toxins over many years. This is why Manitoba set the minimum periods of employment at 25 years for esophageal cancer and 10 years for testicular cancer.

Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick also recently expanded its list of presumptive injuries. As of 2009 firefighters in New Brunswick may be awarded compensation or benefits in relation to esophageal and testicular cancer. New Brunswick's Firefighters' Compensation Act provides coverage to active and retired firefighters who have served the required number of years of service and who have been diagnosed with a specific cancer or who have suffered a heart attack within 24 hours of an emergency response.

Alberta should follow their lead as it would ensure that we continue to protect our honourable firefighters, who risk their own lives to protect ours. These provinces have rightly acknowledged that there is a link between firefighting as an occupation and certain cancers.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan and British Columbia are also examples of provinces that have recently changed their legislation. However, they have only included primary site testicular cancer in their presumptive cancer lists. In '05 and '09 Saskatchewan and British Columbia respectively amended legislation to include testicular cancer under workers' compensation for firefighters. Similarly, Ontario amended its legislation to include esophageal cancer as a prescribed disease in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, these provinces have recognized the connection between certain cancers and firefighting as an occupation like Alberta has, as well. However, they've gone one step further in ensuring that firefighters are fully protected. Statistically firefighters develop certain types of cancers at a higher rate than other workers, and it's vital that these cancers are covered under the firefighters' workers' compensation. Bill 201 would help ensure that our province remains a national leader in workers' compensation coverage, which would provide further protection for Alberta's firefighters and their families.

In addition to the provinces that have recently expanded their presumptive injury list, there are also 17 states that have done the same to include both or one of these proposed cancers. These states include California, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Texas, Rhode Island, Illinois, Alabama, Tennessee, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma. These 12 states have presumption laws that contain broad or nonspecific language that can be interpreted to cover all cancers. Other states such as Washington and Vermont have added only testicular cancer to their list of cancers presumed to be occupational diseases.

That being said, in Washington the presumption of occupational disease may be rebutted by a preponderance of evidence, including the use of tobacco products, physical fitness and weight, lifestyle, hereditary factors, and exposures from other employment or nonemployment activities. For instance, the presumption of occupational disease does not apply to a firefighter who develops a heart or lung condition who's a regular user of tobacco products or has a history of tobacco use.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned earlier, these other jurisdictions are good indicators that Bill 201 is practical and feasible. Furthermore, an expanding list of presumptive injuries to include primary site esophageal and testicular cancers would reach out to our firefighters and show this government's support of the invaluable job that our firefighters do and our commitment to ensuring their well-being. We've talked about that a lot this afternoon.

Alberta is known for being a leader, which is why we should continue to ensure that firefighters have the proper workers' compensation rights. Let's continue to support our firefighters, who face safety risks in their service to Albertans each and every day, by passing Bill 201.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for introducing Bill 201 into the Legislative Assembly. Now, Bill 201 is to add two primary cancers to the presumptive list of cancers so that firefighters may claim under the workers' compensation if they get esophageal and testicular cancers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was just doing a literature research here on the computer. In San Francisco they did an extensive study: 1 in 3 firefighters either have or have had cancer. These are astronomically alarming rates amongst the population. In fact, lung cancer wasn't a leading cause of cancer amongst firefighters. The usual top cancers around are either lung cancer, usually due to smoking, or for men, 1 in 7 get prostate cancer. There's an alarmingly high rate of all these other cancers, especially amongst firefighters.

Before I go on, I'd just like to tell you a couple of brief stories about the interaction I have had with the heroes of our society. Personally our house had a big fire in Squamish. Recently the Olympics are right there, in Vancouver. Nobody was home. Thank God the fire department arrived and put the fire out and saved our home.

I was visiting in Boston at a conference years ago and was building my new home. Somebody was sleeping in my home for the weekend, and there was a fire. At 3:30 in the morning the fire department called and told my family that my home had been put on fire, and they had put it out.

Recently in Edmonton-Meadowlark one of the elementary schools had a fire in the summer, and they put the fire out. The school survived. It has been refurbished, rebuilt, and actually many of those children were introduced today.

Now, other things I'd like to say about these front-line heroes of our society. You know, you have police officers or paramedics or firefighters, those on the front lines of health care. I have had many interactions with them first-hand. In fact, many of them are my friends. We have integrated fire and EMS services in town. It's beyond fire. Any time there is a 911 call, these are the first responders that are there when there is a car accident. In fact, they get there before the ambulance and police do.

I remember as a STARS doctor being called to a scene in Strathcona. It was just like television. This pickup truck was underneath a train, a high-speed accident, and these are the people who rip these vehicles apart so that we can do fantastic work with them in the front lines in the emergency departments. They can't get to us health care workers until these folks up here put their lives at risk in 35 below weather at 3 in the morning in some strange, cold location.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then there are the risks of stepping into a fire at 3 in the morning when you're tired. You're woken up, and suddenly you jump into a truck, put your uniform on. This is a profession that you have to shoot first and think later. You've got to act immediately. You don't have time to think. They are trained professionals, trained to act accordingly in the right way, and the last thing on their mind usually is their safety. The first thing on their mind is everybody else's safety. I'd just like to acknowledge the efforts of all our dear friends and heroes out there. You are the best of us.

Now, because they react first, they place themselves at the greatest risk. Mr. Speaker, when they come to us in the emergency room, patients are cleaned up, and the scene has been secured. When the to-do happens, they place themselves at greatest risk simply because they must. If they don't, there may be a hundred school kids that burn in that school.

As I said, you know, when I first started as a medical student, I did a ride-along with the paramedics. Gee, I felt really nauseated at the end of the ride because they made me sit backwards. We'd go sit in the fire hall. These guys would be cooking healthy food all the time, and they would be working out. As an ignorant, young medical student I thought: man, these guys have got an easy life. But when they're called into action, the reason they've got to eat this healthy food and the reason they have to get their rest and their sleep and the reason they are working out is because they might be called and they might have to lift a 300-pound man down the stairs, so they have to be in fantastic physical shape. In fact, if everybody else did in health care what these folks do, we would have no problems in the health care system. Healthy lifestyles, healthy eating: this is the embodiment of our society.

I would just like to say: you know what, Mr. Speaker? We have to endorse this. We can't even think about not endorsing this because, unfortunately, it's years later when the damaging effects of the poisonous chemicals are known. The dermal exposure from all of these chemicals that these heroes get from the plastics, the dioxin, the carbon monoxide, the cyanide, all the million chemicals: they experience them later on in their life. The last thing we need to do is ask them to prove to us where they got this from when, really, the evidence already exists.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for introducing this. I'd like to thank all of our friends up here in the gallery for being here. I'd like to thank all of our friends in the Assembly for speaking positively to this.

Thank you.

4:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. The objective of this bill is to include two new cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I'd also like to take this time to extend thanks to the brave firefighters in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, specifically those men and women who work in the communities of Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Bow Island, Cypress county, and Forty Mile county.

Mr. Speaker, many of these firefighters have come to see me and have expressed concern that they're not covered adequately by existing workers' compensation legislation. I am pleased to say that the proposals made under Bill 201 will effectively address their valid concerns.

Now, our current legislation does a decent job of ensuring that firefighters and their families do not have to suffer unsupported with a work-related cancer. However, this can always use some updating and improvement. In 2003 Bill 202, the workers' compensation presumptive legislation for firefighters act, received royal assent in Alberta. With the passing of this bill, Alberta became the second province in the country to provide its firefighters with presumptive legislation and coverage under the Workers' Compensation Board. This legislation was brought forward by the former Member for Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, to protect firefighters and their families.

The dangers related to firefighting go beyond just fighting fires. These additional risks are now recognized by this legislation and proposed amendment changes. After all, Mr. Speaker, firefighters are vital to essential services in Alberta and are committed to the safety of all Albertans. We are incredibly lucky to have such brave men and women shield us from danger, and when a firefighter is unable to do their job, it weakens our line of defence.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat: it isn't just flames that pose an on-the-job hazard for firefighters. The unseen threat posed by toxic chemicals can be just as deadly. Firefighters are exposed to many compounds designated as carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. These include benzene, diesel, engine exhaust, chloroform, soot, styrene, and formaldehyde. Some of these cancer-causing agents can actually be absorbed through the skin.

It's amazing that one of the most dangerous occupations in the world can become even more hazardous when smoke is factored in. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States points out that there are some 70,000 substances listed as toxic and that if these are to combine, there are over 70 million possible toxic combinations.

Moreover, science has shown an undeniable link between firefighting and cancer. The Alberta Workers' Compensation Board has stated that almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths since the year 2000 have also been due to cancer. The Workers' Compensation Act in regard to firefighters uses presumptive legislation to determine compensation, entitlement, application, and payment. The Workers' Compensation Act states in essence that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a cancer where a primary site is among the list in presumptive legislation, the illness shall be presumed to be an occupational disease. In simple terms, a firefighter's work environment can be the cause of cancer development, and that's why Alberta passed presumptive legislation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta was the first province to recognize seven forms of cancer as work related. Later an eighth primary site was added to the list. Currently these eight cancers are recognized by the Alberta government as more likely to develop in firefighters than in the general population, and these have been mentioned in debate many times today. If passed, Bill 201 would amend the list to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer.

In order to qualify under the primary site cancer regulation, a firefighter must prove a minimum period of exposure to the hazards of firefighting. For example, Mr. Speaker, to qualify for compensation for leukemia, a firefighter must have been a full member of the fire protection service for five years. For compensation for brain cancer it's 10 years. For bladder, lung, and ureter cancer it's 15 years. For kidney, colorectal, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma they must have been working for a fire protection service for 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, without presumptive legislation the responsibility would fall to the firefighter to prove that their cancer was caused by their occupation. In the absence of presumptive legislation firefighters have been asked: at which fire did you contract this cancer?

This legislation removes the burden of proof from firefighters when a diagnosis is made. In addition, with this presumptive legislation firefighters who are diagnosed with cancer do not have to deal with the compounded stress of the diagnosis along with how they would provide for their families in the event that they are unable to work.

Mr. Speaker, advances in science and technology can provide us with new information regarding cancer and the causes of cancer on an ever-evolving basis. If passed, Alberta can continue to be a leader in the protection of our vital services and ensure that firefighters and their families feel a veil of protection in their choice of career. Moreover, it'll work to raise awareness of the important role that individuals play in our society. Finally, it could allay potential fears of those contemplating the profession, ultimately encouraging them to pursue it.

Our current legislation has taken into account the best interests of the firefighters themselves as well as the vocation of firefighting. By passing Bill 201, we will continue to demonstrate our appreciation and support for these everyday heroes. Firefighters put their lives on the line to protect us and the public, and they do not think twice about putting themselves in harm's way.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this legislation, this bill, and urge all members of the House to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and speak in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would first like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for introducing this piece of legislation. I'd also like to take a moment to thank all the men and women who serve as firefighters to protect and provide safety to all Albertans. These men and women put their lives on the line every day. It is a risk that they and their families live with on a daily basis. They train relentlessly. They serve honourably, without hesitation and with great ability and perfection.

This bill we are discussing today is small but meaningful, a way to further support our firefighters. It is also another example of this government's commitment towards Alberta's firefighters, their families, and the safety of all Albertans. Bill 201 would make amendments that would expand the list of presumptive cancers for firefighters to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary

site testicular cancer. This expands what was achieved in 2003 with Bill 202, the workers' compensation presumptive legislation for firefighters act.

The 2003 legislation created firefighters' coverage for certain types of cancers under the WCB, including brain, bladder, urethra, kidney, colorectal, and lung as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. However, since the first passing of this presumptive legislation research has begun to show that the current list of cancers should be expanded to include esophageal and testicular cancer. That is what Bill 201 achieves by including these two additional primary cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation.

Mr. Speaker, I would specifically like to highlight the many important roles that firefighters play in keeping us safe and how this bill would provide support for these brave men and women. Each day firefighters arrive on the job not knowing what the day may bring. From motor vehicle accidents to wildfires to structural fires firefighters are exposed to various challenges and perform various roles with our safety as their primary objective. The roles of firefighters include fighting fires, rescuing people, as well as fire prevention. Prevention is the ultimate goal of firefighters. Preventing fires by taking necessary safety precautions reduces the number of incidents where firefighters are required to put their lives on the line for the safety of our families. However, incidents do occur that require firefighters to be on the job, ready to deal with any situation they may come upon. Firefighters are extensively trained to deal with a variety of different emergency situations.

Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and the Member for Calgary-North Hill as well as myself spent a day last fall with firefighters learning about their training in a firefighter 101 course. It was very informative for all of us. It was also a great experience to take a walk in their shoes and just feel the adrenaline and what they go through on a daily basis.

4:50

These firefighters are trained to deal with the most complex and tragic motor vehicle accidents that require the use of technologies such as the jaws of life and other hydraulic tools to remove victims from motor vehicles. They also allowed us to demonstrate and play with the jaws of life a little bit to see what it is actually like to operate that apparatus.

Firefighting can also lead firefighters into complex and dangerous firefighting situations. In each circumstance firefighters use their training and ability to achieve the goal of saving lives, saving property, and protecting the environment. Fires under any circumstances can pose harmful and challenging environments. For example, most fires involve solids like wood, paper, grass, and plastic; however, a fire may also involve flammable liquids like petroleum, oils, and kerosene and flammable gases like methane, propane, butane, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide. Additionally, fires can also involve combustible metals like sodium, magnesium, lithium, and aluminum, each of which provides different and difficult challenges.

Our firefighters deal with these situations on a daily basis and have the training to know exactly how to best save lives, property, and our environment. However, Mr. Speaker, while firefighters are putting themselves out on the line to protect us, they face many personal dangers that can result in long-term debilitating effects. As described, firefighters are exposed on a regular basis to numerous burning materials, chemicals, and other toxins. When these

chemicals and plastics burn, they combine to form complex and unknown chemical combinations which can be very harmful.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States there are more than 70,000 substances listed as toxic; however, when these toxins combine, there are approximately 70 million possible toxic combinations. Evidence points to these carcinogens as having a direct connection with various cancers. Despite our best efforts at prevention fires do occur, and this requires the training, knowledge, and the ability of these firefighters. Bill 201 fully recognizes the roles and situations that these men and women face and how in performing these roles . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you very much, but time now precludes any further debate.

I'll ask the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a pleasure to have this opportunity to bring such an important subject before the House. I want to thank all the men and women of the fire services in Alberta who have spent a good portion of their afternoon listening to the debate from my hon. colleagues. I want to thank my colleagues from both sides of the House for the eloquent way that they spoke to this topic and thank them all for their support. If I'm not mistaken, every member spoke very much in favour of this piece of legislation.

With that, I would move to close the debate, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a second time]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might beg the indulgence of the House to note that we have only five minutes left in the time period allocated for consideration of private members' business, bills, and I'm wondering if I might seek unanimous consent to call it 5 o'clock and move on to Motion 501.

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we'll do that, but I am reluctant to do this. There are still five minutes left. An hon. member could be present to move a second bill, and that would be within the time frame. Can the Deputy Government House Leader advise me if that hon. member will raise a point later?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess if that member is here and wishes to deny the consent, then that would be the case. My concern is that five minutes is generally far less than what the member would normally have to properly introduce a bill, and it would be split over two days.

The Speaker: Again, my point is a procedural one. There is provision in here in the standing orders to continue this order of business till 5 o'clock, and the standing order says that we then move to the next one. There is opportunity for another private member to raise a bill and introduce the bill. The member not being here, I just want to make sure in my head that this does not preclude a privilege issue that we'll come back to later.

The hon. member can proceed with the request, then, for unanimous consent to adjourn this motion and proceed to the next order of business. Please make that request, and we'll see where it goes.

Mr. Renner: All right, Mr. Speaker. I would seek unanimous consent of the House to conclude business for private members' bills and move on to a private member's motion, that being Motion 501.

The Speaker: I'll ask one question. Does any hon. member oppose this request? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

MLA Salaries and Benefits Review

501. Ms Pastoor moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand up and speak to my Motion 501. The question would be: why should I be talking about this now? Partly, I think, we all understand how we draw numbers, and it's been fortuitous for me to be able to have drawn the number when, actually, at this point in time our salaries are frozen. So I believe that this is the time that would be good for an independent review to take their time and review the salaries and benefits, that haven't been reviewed for 16 years, by an independent commissioner. Actually, in this case it was an accounting firm, KPMG. At the end of, I believe, 2011 – our salaries are frozen for two years – the questions would be: should there be an increase, should there be a catch-up, or were, in fact, the salaries of 2009 still fair?

As I've mentioned, the last time there was a review was in 1994, and there were recommendations at that time. One of them was to have a basis for tracking compensation needs. They also thought that the comparison between the substantial gap between member and private-sector compensation wasn't, perhaps, a suitable way of comparison. At this point in time I think that the public and private salaries have come a little closer together, so I'm not sure that this particular recommendation, with the addendum to it, would be still valid.

The second recommendation was to appoint an independent commission and, in fact, that once every three to five years it should be reviewed by that commission. On December 2 in the Members' Services Committee, which is the committee at this point in time that does set our salaries, the leader of the fourth party proposed a motion to strike an independent committee to review the remunerations of the MLAs. At that point the Liberal members of that committee did support that. The Premier and his cabinet increased their own salaries behind closed doors within the last year; however, the Premier and the cabinet also announced that they would reduce their salaries as of October 29, and the October 15 release was released from the office of the Premier.

5:00

There certainly was a push-back from Albertans when the Liberals objected to the process in this House, but I believe the point is that Albertans do feel that they have a vested interest in how their elected officials are compensated and the benefits that they receive. As I've mentioned, how it compares to private and public compensation, I think, could certainly be a point that could be reviewed. At this point in time who gets what and for what I don't think is necessarily the issue. I think that the establishment of an independent commission to review our current salaries and benefits is the issue on the table.

Certainly, by passing this motion, we would be doing exactly what this Premier has said that he wants. He wants open, transparent, and accountable government. Because we as a government legislatively do vote on our own salaries – these are public dollars that are going out – I believe that all MLAs would also like an open, transparent, and accountable way of actually talking to their constituents and to other Albertans on how we are paid.

There were some jurisdictional comparisons, and there are some governments – the Parliament of Canada, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories – where at this point the remuneration is decided by an arm's-length process, and it's formally recognized in legislation. The Northwest Territories has a different way of doing it, but they have it set out in legislation that within two years after the polling day of a general election the Speaker establishes a commission and appoints members who are independent, neutral, and knowledgeable, and they establish the guidelines and the principles for the responsibility of this commission. The commission then, of course, reviews MLAs' compensation.

One of the reasons I feel very strongly about this motion is that when I sat on city council, this is exactly what we did. We did have – I believe that it was KPMG as well – an independent accounting company that did do the comparisons. They did it within Alberta, within Alberta municipalities, and did come up with what we as a council – again, we had to vote on it because they were public dollars – decided was fair. Now, they also had a recommendation on how we would go forward.

Yes, in this House we do have a mechanism whereby every year the weekly earnings ratio is looked at, and our compensation raise is based on that. I think that may be fair. I'd like to have someone tell me that it's fair. The point is that all that does is really raise the base salary. It's some of the other compensations that I think have to be looked at in terms of what is fair: committee work and many of the extras that MLAs, of course, do.

I feel that when I had the independent review as an alderman, I had no problem defending my salary to people who probably thought, as they still do, that all politicians are overpaid. Unless someone has really walked a mile in someone else's moccasins, I don't think that they really understand what others do or the hours that are involved in someone else's jobs. MLAs work long, hard hours, but I don't believe the general population particularly cares about that as long as their voices are taken forward by their elected officials, which is why they were elected, and that they are fairly paid and only fairly compensated. Even if increases are justified, the public perception would be more amiable towards the increase if it came from an outside body and it didn't come from, certainly, those who would stand to benefit directly.

At present the MLA salaries and all of the allowances, et cetera, for ministers, the Premier, leaders of the opposition are posted publicly on the Assembly website. But to determine who receives the committee pay and the total amount paid out to each member requires that you look at the report of payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly, which is tabled once a year by the President of the Treasury Board. This is a sessional paper, and it's also available in the Legislature Library. I think that it requires a fair amount of work to dig out this information. At the present time it's not posted online, and I believe that it should be.

Clearly, the compensation from 1994 was . . . [Ms Pastoor's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of nine additional members who want to participate. We have approximately 45 minutes. I'm going to recognize them in the following order: the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Drayton Valley-Calmor, then Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, then Calgary-Varsity, Strathcona, Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share some of my thoughts on Motion 501, which was brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East. This motion proposes to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits paid to MLAs. This commission then would be required to report their findings to the House. In my mind, this motion is all about ensuring that Albertans receive high-quality representation. While I recognize that there's some angst regarding the present compensation, it's important that it is adequate to ensure that existing and prospective MLAs are fairly paid for what they do. After all, Albertans deserve to have confidence knowing that they are receiving high-quality representation for their taxpayer dollars.

I also believe that Albertans recognize and expect that their elected representatives are fairly compensated for their work. Therefore, I think it is important that we have a process to determine MLA salaries that Albertans can be confident about. To this end, Mr. Speaker, I welcome this proposed independent commission. After all, this would help to ensure the confidence and support of Albertans. However, I believe that for it to be effective, it needs to represent the interests and perspectives of all Albertans. In my mind, the membership of the independent committee should reflect the diversity of the constituents that MLAs are elected to represent. It's important to understand as well that this commission will have to have the ability to look at this issue and could go either way with their findings. In fact, they could recommend that the existing compensation is less than it should be and should be increased.

This commission should also include members familiar with the different challenges facing rural and urban members. My constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat is a blended constituency that includes a vast area of rural Alberta, with oil and gas and agricultural issues. As well, my blended constituency includes about one-third of the city of Medicine Hat.

Mr. Speaker, this commission should also include someone who is familiar with the job of an MLA. After all, I believe that if we reflect this diversity correctly, the commission's report will provide Albertans the opportunity to carefully examine and reflect on its findings. Again, Albertans must have confidence in the membership of the independent commission in order to have confidence in the findings of this commission.

5:10

Some questions come to mind. Who will determine the makeup of this commission? Who is going to decide what is fair? For example, I might include the salaries of some of the presidents and CEOs of some of the companies in the oil and gas sector and the agricultural sector: EnCana, \$12 million plus bonus; EPCOR, \$1.9 million plus bonus; ATCO, \$4 million plus bonus; Agrium, \$7.9 million plus bonus. Given some of these numbers, what would the commission recommend?

In closing, I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing this motion to the attention of the House. I believe that creating an independent commission to explore the compensation given the members is a good idea. We just need to ensure that this commission reflects the values of all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a privilege to rise and speak very much in favour of Motion 501, requesting that an independent committee be set up for MLA pay. I'd really like to congratulate the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing forward this motion and putting some good, solid work into it. It's an idea that is long past its due date. It's time that Alberta really catches up to some jurisdictions in our great nation by following what they've done and establishing an independent committee to set MLA wages.

It's not that we necessarily do it badly here in this Legislature. It's not necessarily that what we have been paid here in the past or even right now is wrong. What it comes down to is the fact that in open and transparent governments, rightly or wrongly, the rank-and-file population, the Marthas and the Henrys of Alberta, don't want us to be in charge of setting our own pay rate. Simply put, it's like the Caesar's wife rule, I guess, that we politicians should be following: not only do we have to be pure; we have to be seen to be pure. By that, what I mean is that we shouldn't be setting our own rates. The average Albertan would feel much better if there was an independent commission that was established that could look at different salary structures around Alberta, with maybe some union representation, maybe some representation from the business community, maybe some representation from all walks of life on this committee to add a certain bit of context to what we do in the Legislature and on what our pay should be. Let's face it; that's going to entail a whole complex variety of arguments from all across the board.

Let's look at this. One of the things is that we want good people to come into this Legislature. That's going to entail some sort of pay to, I guess, reflect what people are willing to come to public service for. That said, there's got to be a recognition that we in this House do come here with, hopefully, higher goals than simply drawing a paycheque. For if that was the only thing, many of us who are here, well, wouldn't be doing this. That's not why we're here. At the same time, it has to reflect, I guess, a balance as to what is going to attract people to this House and a balance that reflects the public service element to what, in fact, we are doing.

I would state that the process that we've gone through here over the last course, since I was elected in March 2008, really hasn't been that transparent or open or, I guess, in step with what the Alberta electorate wants. Job number one, or I think the first thing we did here upon my arrival in the House, was to go into a Members' Services Committee and to pass what looked to the average Albertan like a large pay increase. If we look around, that's what happened. We did it at a Members' Services Committee meeting. Yeah, I saw the letters go out from the Premier's office saying that it was decided at an all-party committee level, but we know what happened. We came in here, and the government decided: we're going to boost pay. Fair enough. It's in your purview to do so, but it wasn't on an election platform. It wasn't decided beforehand. It was simply after an election where a vast majority was elected. We thought: "Hey, let's put through a pay raise. Now the time is right. They'll forget about it by the next election, and everything will be back to normal by then."

But that's just what I think. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm wrong. Nevertheless, to take this thing, whatever it is, from there, to take whether that was true or whether it was not true – let's just set up an independent committee to go forward and do this work. Take it out of the hands of the politicians. Yes, at the end of the day I know we're going to have to pass it, but at least we can wave around a piece of paper saying: "Look here. Sorry we have to do it, but this committee is making us do it."

Nevertheless, I appreciate the hon. member bringing this forward. I believe it goes a long way to having open and transparent government. I believe the people of Alberta would feel better about this motion being put forward, and it would simply take a lot of static off both the governing party and the politicians who are in this honourable Chamber.

I thank you for this time, for allowing me to speak, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing other members of this honourable House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and join debate on Motion 501 as brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. This motion proposes to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly. This commission would then report its findings to the all-party Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, the body currently responsible for all matters related to MLA remuneration.

The Special Standing Committee on Members' Services is comprised of 12 members and chaired by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In addition to determining adjustments to MLAs' salaries, allowances, and benefits, the committee is responsible for approving the annual estimates of the Legislative Assembly Office; modifying regulations, orders, or other directives governing the office's financial and personnel administration; and establishing human resource information and financial management policy for the Legislative Assembly Office. Without a doubt this committee operates in a transparent and accountable manner. Records of its debates are available on the Legislative Assembly website, and public conversations surrounding the appropriate levels of MLA compensation are always welcome.

In 1998 the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approved a motion to adjust components of member remuneration on April 1 of each year by the same percentage increase or decrease as in the average weekly earnings for Alberta as reported by Statistics Canada's survey of employment, payrolls, and hours for the immediately preceding calendar year. In February 2009 this committee voted to freeze this annual adjustment for the fiscal year April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of this all-party committee to review this policy in future deliberations. Therefore, the research and conclusions of the independent commission might be helpful to the committee in future meetings. Other parties in this Legislative Assembly through the Members' Services Committee could have input on how to assemble a commission that satisfactorily represents what they see as credible and reliable information on this topic.

Mr. Speaker, I support the proposal of an independent commission assisting the committee, but the assessment of remunerating MLAs' salary should be left to the Members' Services Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and participate in the debate on Motion 501 this afternoon. Certainly, it's a motion that I think all hon. members of the House should give consideration to and, hopefully, support. What the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is proposing here is

certainly a fine idea, to have an independent committee review our remuneration and certainly our benefits.

5:20

With no disrespect to the Members' Services Committee, I think this Legislative Assembly and democracy would be better served if our remuneration and benefits were set by a completely independent body. This issue has been discussed and debated through the entire province, particularly since the last election and particularly since each and every one of us in this House received a substantial increase in our pay and, it would be safe to say, our benefits as well.

Now, when you look at the work that individual members do regardless of what side of the House they sit on, members work very, very hard for their constituents and work very hard in this Assembly. There's no doubt about that. But when we look at what other jurisdictions have done whenever this discussion has occurred, we only have to look to the west, to British Columbia, and see what was done there. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, with British Columbia we're talking . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, British Columbia started with the citizens' assembly. There were many, many things that came out of that citizens' assembly, including fixed election dates, what role citizens should play through referendum, the overall composition of the Assembly. Certainly, MLA pay and benefits were discussed. As I recall, we had a presentation from a member of that citizens' committee. This gentleman was from Creston, British Columbia. He talked in the presentation he made to us about how good it would be if there was another way to set the scale for remuneration and benefits to each and every MLA. It was interesting to hear this gentleman describe the proceedings of the citizens' assembly, and regardless of where they went in the province, whether it was urban, whether it was rural, whether it was south, or whether it was north, citizens all had sort of a consistent opinion on this matter.

When we look at this House, I really think we should see the merit in this motion. This should be the logical first step towards establishing a completely independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for the members of this Assembly and to report to the government and to this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate and leave it at that. Certainly, other speakers have spoken about previous recommendations that have been made. The recommendations that were made, Mr. Speaker, were obviously read by Members' Services.

Now, it was discussed earlier, certainly, that KPMG recommended that MLAs' salaries should increase. They certainly have. In order to maintain public confidence in this institution and the members that have the privilege of sitting in here, I really would encourage everyone to please consider this motion, to give it some thought, pass it, and allow it to be the first step towards reforming how our benefits and our remuneration are set in this House.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 501 as brought forward by the hon.

Member for Lethbridge-East. Motion 501 urges the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

Mr. Speaker, I support the objectives of this motion as it is in line with this government's record of a transparent and accountable government. I welcome the opportunity to have a discussion on how MLAs' salaries and benefits are determined. But I can tell you from my past elected experiences, both as school board trustee and municipal councillor and mayor, that this is always a very difficult issue because at the end of the day elected officials are responsible to make the decision on their salaries, and it is never easy. I welcome and support this motion, as I believe my constituents will as well.

Establishing an independent commission presents certain questions and challenges. Challenges would arise such as how many members would sit on the commission as well as the process for selecting members. All parties represented in the Legislative Assembly could provide valuable input as to how to comprise the commission.

If this committee were formed, it is important that the commission should reflect the broad diversity of Albertans, whom Members of the Legislative Assembly serve. As elected officials MLAs gladly serve all members of their communities, and the membership of the commission should indeed reflect their interests and perspectives. This could include Albertans of various professions, including labourers, teachers, office workers, certainly business leaders, and others.

Mr. Speaker, other provinces have experience in establishing independent commissions to review MLAs' salaries and benefits. As such, it may be helpful to consider their expertise in forming the commission. The governments of British Columbia and Manitoba formed commissions in 2007 while Saskatchewan established an independent review committee in 2006. In selecting its membership, the Legislative Assembly could include members from these commissions for Alberta's own review. These individuals could include present and former Speakers, MLAs, chairs of the commission, and private citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing forward this well-intentioned motion. This committee would provide an opportunity to provide helpful advice to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which has the responsibility for establishing salaries and benefits for MLAs. In selecting its membership, I hope that all parties can provide useful input as to how to bring this committee forward to best reflect the diverse views and perspectives of our constituents. Therefore, I'd like to extend my support for Motion 501 and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak to Motion 501 on MLA compensation, put forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. The motion conforms with some of the rules that we get when we ask to propose a motion in that it has to direct the government in some way. I just want to say from the beginning that I believe this is something that is ultimately in the purview of the Members' Services Committee. However, that does not mean that the Assembly itself could not take up the matter, I believe.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of public concern with respect to not only the level of compensation for MLAs and for members of Executive Council specifically but also the process by which these decisions have been made. I want to indicate in general that I think it's very important that there be some independent look at the compensation of MLAs. That is something that I think the public very much would like to see.

5:30

As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East indicated, at the last meeting of Members' Services Committee, in December, I made a similar motion, which has, however, some significant differences. That motion was made in Members' Services Committee, which I think is the more appropriate place to bring it. I'm going to support this motion, Mr. Speaker, but with some reservations. First of all, I believe that the appropriate place to deal with this is Members' Services. Members' Services Committee did in fact deal with it.

The other problem, though, is the general nature of the motion. First of all, it involves the government in determining the MLAs' compensation. I think that's a problem. I understand the problem the member has because when you submit motions for approval, they will tell you that there are certain ways that you can get a motion on the floor, and usually it's to urge the government to do something. But I have a reservation about the government selecting this committee. That's number one.

In the motion that I made in Members' Services Committee, it specifically said that the terms of reference of the committee must include "the requirement that the committee take into account the workload and remuneration of elected members of provincial and territorial Assemblies in Canada." That's important because I've had an experience before at the municipal order of government where a similar committee was appointed and the view on that committee – because this view primarily came from business members on the committee, they were amazed at the amount of work that politicians were asked to do for very little compensation. They had a frame of reference in their minds of the compensation levels you would see at an executive level in the private sector, which is quite a bit higher, so they felt that the compensation should be dramatically increased.

When the recommendation came back from the committee, it was for a significant increase in the salary of the city councillors at that time, and there was a public backlash against it. That's why when I made my motion, I specified that they have to look at compensation of other people doing the same job. I think that's really important. The risk here is, of course, that we're going to have recommendations made coming back to us for even bigger increases in our salary, and I think the public wouldn't stand for it. I think that's an important thing that has to be included in the terms of reference of any independent committee, and that is that we're comparing apples to apples, not apples to watermelons. That I think is something.

But, you know, I think we should support this motion because I think having some independent review of the compensation of MLAs is appropriate, and I think that the public expects some sort of action on our part to ensure that our compensation is not out of line with other MLAs as they operate in different provincial and territorial Assemblies. I would urge, then, all members to support the motion, and I would hope that some of the difficulties that I have outlined can be overcome in the implementation of it so that we do get truly an independent review of our compensation and one that is reasonable and compares us against our peers rather than against people who may have significantly higher expectations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In speaking in favour of Motion 501, which is calling for an independent commission to recommend how compensation is provided for Members of this Legislative Assembly, it's important to note the nature of a motion. It's a recommendation of a desired direction, an urging the government to take steps in the direction suggested. It's extremely important that we have this discussion, and it gives me great hope that so far within this discussion, which we're better than halfway through, the majority of individuals who have spoken, while they may have expressed some individual reservations, support the notion that the motion is putting forward.

I personally believe, Mr. Speaker, that collectively we've lost the confidence of the Alberta electorate, and I say that in a very nonpartisan way. Forty-one per cent of eligible voters chose to participate in the March 2008 election. Whether they chose not to participate because they were satisfied with the status quo, whether they were busy that day, whether they were alienated, whether they didn't figure their vote counted, we'll never know exactly why we had such a low voter turnout, but something every single member of this House has urged for is transparency and accountability. The hon. Premier was chosen as the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party based on a platform of transparency and accountability, something that I believe every single member in this House shares.

Now, being a member of an opposition party, we basically are outvoted regardless of whether it's in the House or whether it's on a particular committee. I would suggest that this motion is not only in opposition parties' best interests, who are on the record asking for an independent commission, whether on the Members' Services Committee or in this House as a whole; I would say that this lets the government off the hook.

It takes away any accusation of self-interest by putting the authority on the shoulders of an independent commission, and I agree very much that we have to make sure that that commission has representation from former MLAs who can attest to the amount of work that we as representatives of our constituencies provide. It will be a challenge creating the membership on that independent commission; there's no doubt about it. But it takes the responsibility, to a large degree, for setting our own wages off our shoulders, and it puts it in the hands of an independent commission to make the recommendations, which then the Members' Services Committee will eventually accept or reject.

Now, we've had suggestions from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who generally, I believe, supported the motion, but he was the first to bring forward the spectre of large salary increases. That spectre has been echoed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: what if the independent committee looks at the work that we do and suggests that we're not being nearly compensated for the work we do? Well, again, the independence of the commission with the discussion in Members' Services to provide what might in this case be a leavening or a levelling of the proposed wage increase will be extremely important.

5:40

The convoluted calculation that led to the significant increase for the Premier and cabinet ministers was based on the opposition leaders getting a significant increase. Now, it's important to note that that wasn't something that they asked for; it was something that they actually voted against. But based on the fact that the committee decided to give the opposition leader an increase, they then said:

well, sheesh, if we've given the opposition leader this increase, we'd better darn well give our Premier and members of the cabinet an increase. That was a bit of a convoluted calculation, and with this Motion 501's recommendation the convolution would be taken out.

I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is anxious to speak, and I am equally anxious to hear him, so thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 501, brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. There are a few things to keep in mind. I think a review by an independent group probably is a good idea, although currently that duty, of course, is done by the Members' Services Committee, which has representation from all parties now. So all parties are represented. The formation of an independent commission, I guess, could further promote accountability and transparency in regard to setting the salary and benefits for MLAs. Our government, of course, has always promoted these qualities through many different initiatives: all-party committees, ministerial expenses available for public view online, and so on.

Just prior to the formation of this type of commission I think certain criteria should be met and agreed on by all parties. The commission itself would need to represent the diverse views and interests of all our constituents, of all Albertans. I'm just trying to picture what that committee would look like. We would need, I guess, people from different occupations. So maybe we'd need a cashier, a teacher, a seven-figure CEO, construction worker, small businessperson, probably a QC – I'm looking around this room – a nurse, a fellow that owned a drilling company, a fellow that sold his business to do this.

People would understand, I think, perhaps, the opportunity cost, not just what we're compensated for the duties that we perform in this room or outside. When I think of that, would any of those people truly understand what this job is? I've been in it for a couple of years, and I'm still learning what this job is. But one thing I learned right away is that it's not just a job; it's your whole life while you're in here. The diversity that we would need on this committee would involve so many people from so many different areas of expertise, I think, to get it right that it would become a very, very large committee.

Then the next question, of course, is: should this committee be able to come to some consensus – it's been brought up a couple of times – when we got the answer, what would we do with it?

It's a bit complex. We could have, again, measurables against peers, but responsibilities and so on would be a bit different in every province, obligations. Our province, of course, is the economic driver for Canada at this time, so the decisions that are made here can impact the entire country. Again, I just don't know how you would measure that.

I think it would be complicated work. It could be cumbersome. I am having trouble visualizing what the committee would look like. But I do believe that all the members of this Assembly are interested in the views of their constituents regarding MLA compensation. Motion 501, you know, would give us the opportunity to learn from this independent commission, however it's made up, on whether compensation is fair and adequate. With all parties' consent and the committee reflecting Alberta's diverse population and backgrounds and experience, an independent commission could provide valuable input on the compensation of MLAs.

In summary, I'm not sure what this commission would look like, who it would be, or what the results would be, but in general I do support Motion 501, and I do urge all other members to support Motion 501. Thank you.

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

Dr. Brown: I want to thank my colleagues for being brief to allow as many people as possible to participate in the debate. I am supportive of Motion 501, sponsored by my colleague from Lethbridge-East.

As my colleague from Strathcona has said, being an MLA is a lot more than a job; it's one's life. We do have a lot of responsibilities, and for those responsibilities we should be compensated in a fair and equitable manner. However, Mr. Speaker, the present means of setting compensation and benefits presents us with a clear conflict of interest. Our purpose and our duty in serving the House ought to be to give faithful and undivided loyalty to the best interests of our constituents and to all Albertans.

It's inherently as problematic for a committee of this House to determine their own compensation as it is for members of Executive Council to set theirs. Members of the House should divest themselves of this responsibility of setting their own salaries and those of the Executive Council. I support the motion for the establishment of an independent body to determine these matters and to make recommendations to the House.

Mr. Speaker, it's not for me to say what might be undertaken by such an independent body or what conclusions might be drawn from such a review. However, I would say that in my respectful opinion the present payment of the so-called transition allowances should be eliminated. They attract criticism, deservedly in my view, because they are far more generous than what transition allowances or severance payments or lump-sum retiring allowances are in the private sector. They continue to grow in magnitude with continued service in the House far beyond the upper limits of what jurisprudence would indicate as justifiable in the world of business, and they accrue even to those who voluntarily terminate their service with this House.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that an outside body might give serious consideration to reinstating some sort of a pension plan for members of the House which need not be modelled on the federal Parliament but might reflect the level of pensions available to managers in our civil service. Those members who have transition allowances accumulated might be permitted, perhaps, to contribute or transfer those benefits retroactively to a pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, the composition of an independent body should include not only professionals, experts in compensation, members of the business community but probably also ordinary members of the public at large. Whatever its makeup it should be free from the influences of members of this House, and its recommendations should be binding.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to eliminate the conflict of interest and the resulting stigma which accrues to us as Members of the Legislative Assembly when we set our own compensation. I urge all members of the Assembly to support the motion.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to say that, like many of the comments today, I support Motion 501. I believe that not only the fact but the perception of the fact relative to the independent review of setting salaries for MLAs is most appropriate. I think it reflects the spirit of what Albertans are saying

in coffee shops. I want to say to the hon. member who is proposing the motion that I think this is a noble cause, and obviously she has been listening to what people are saying in coffee shops across Alberta.

Consequently, I will also be supporting Motion 501. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate?

Then shall I call on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate?

5:50

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of humility that I do stand up and thank everyone that has supported this motion. I really appreciate the comments that came from the speakers because I do know that they have reflected on this motion and have given it thought. So thank you for that. We know that motions are for government consideration and that they really don't have to do anything in particular with them, but passing this motion will open up and push the really important merit of the recognition of this discussion of what the commission would look like and of having an independent review.

Some of the comments that I have heard have been right on the point, as far as I'm concerned. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is asking for diverse members for this commission. I think we've heard that thought from other speakers, and I certainly agree. Also, because we would have diverse members, it doesn't preclude having an MLA on that commission or, in fact, perhaps a retired MLA that truly understands the kind of work that we do in this House. As has already been mentioned, it's more than a job. It truly is a 24-hours, seven days a week job where you're always sort of on.

Comparing my salary to EPCOR and EnCana presidents, I think, would be most interesting. However, I think that we have to compare apples to apples and not apples to extremely specialized apples.

The Member for Calgary-Hays also suggested that it should be left up to the Members' Services Committee. To me, it is still self-serving to set your own salaries, but the Members' Services Committee could work towards establishing this commission and what it should look like. I think that's the first discussion that would

come forward before we would allow them to go forward and look at our salaries.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar was also calling on diverse membership and actually had some very good suggestions on the kind of commission it would be and the kind of members of society that would be reflected in that.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood suggested that the public really wants to know what our salaries are, and I agree with that. Again, I think that Members' Services could deal with what the commission should look like. As I've said, they could establish the parameters of what a commission would look like and what kind of people would comprise that committee. I think, Mr. Speaker, that having the criteria set by Members' Services is an excellent idea.

The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has suggested reinstating pension plans, which I've often thought was probably a fair idea, but perhaps these pension plans could start at 65 because I think that we know at this point in time that there are people that have been collecting very rich pensions for a great length of time. So if it started at 65 and if, unfortunately, a death occurred ahead of that, then there would be some kind of formula that would have that money go forward to their estate.

I think there have been some very good ideas expressed around this motion. As I've said, I think that having this motion pass will at least get this discussion to go forward, and I think at this point in time it is very important that it does so.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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