



Province of Alberta

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.

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 10 of the brightest stars from Destiny Christian school in my riding. They're accompanied here today by Mr. Glenn Mullen, who is their teacher and also the principal of the school. As you know, they're going to be our leaders tomorrow. They're in the public gallery, and I'd like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 100 visitors from Spruce Grove, the Woodhaven middle school, along with a number of parents and teachers. They are seated in both galleries, obviously, today. I'm extremely pleased to have had an opportunity to speak with the students this afternoon on the steps. I can tell you that they are very knowledgeable about what it is that is happening in this Legislature and what MLAs do. We have teachers Mr. Moe Teliani, Miss Emily Pearce, Ms Deb Schellenberger, Miss Keri Getz, Mrs. Triena Hoople, Miss Christine Van Natter and parent helpers Mr. Karl Iles, Mrs. Eileen Sherburne, Mrs. Jeanette Chmilar, and Mr. Jeff Gamble. As I said, they are seated in both galleries. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the pleasure of taking part in a news conference with the Premier, members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, and individuals from Edmonton's homeless serving community. There with me were several individuals, some of which have joined us here today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the following people: Susan McGee, member of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, if she could please stand; Mr. Tim Richter, president and CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation; Miss Judi Deslauriers, a former homeless Edmontonian who now is in permanent housing supports; and her follow-up support worker, Miss Samantha Smith. I would ask that you please join me and give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this

Assembly today two of my constituents, Norm and Judy Radomsky from Willingdon. I just want to say that they travelled here today for some meetings and stopped in to see the Legislature. I do want to add a little extra comment. Judy had gone to school with the Premier, but as it looks today, as we can see, I think it was a K to 12 school. I think she was in K, and I'm pretty sure the Premier may have been in 12. If I could ask them to please stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. Firstly, I'd like to introduce my new assistant, Amanda Karlzen. She was raised on the family farm in Carrot Creek, and she's been an accomplished 4-H member and leader in her community. While studying political science at the university here in Edmonton, she still worked weekends running farm machinery, feeding, processing, calving, and other general duties. Amanda, it's now time to put your political studies to work here at the Legislature. Welcome. Please stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction, Brock Mulligan, is more of a public thank you to a very bright young man that has served this Legislature for five years. Brock has taken a new job outside government and will be a true asset to his new employer. Brock, thank you for your dedicated service. The door to my office is always open. Please stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in Edmonton in particular is Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week. There are many women and men working to raise public awareness about issues relating to sexual exploitation. Members may have noticed in both galleries quite a number of people wearing orange. Those are the people who have come forward today to watch us in question period and debate. They are seated in both galleries. I will quickly read their names and ask them to rise as I do so: Kristin Raworth, Kate Quinn, Sarah Ramsey, Danielle Boudreau, Rejoyce Appedoe, Sue Huff, Patti Brady, Dorian Smith, Lou Kinartz, Andrew Fiebiger, Andrea Burkheart, Karen Smith, and there may be others. I see that there are. Anyone involved with this group wearing orange, please rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to introduce to you and through you a group of university students who are at the Legislature today representing CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students. They are – and I would ask them to stand when they're named – Duncan Wojtaszek of CAUS staff; Beverly Eastham, representing the University of Calgary; Kay She from the University of Calgary; Jeremy – I'm going to use the French pronunciation – Girard of the University of Lethbridge; Hardave Birk of the University of Calgary; Lauren Webber of the University of Calgary, who has a direct line of connection to the minister of aboriginal affairs; Zach Fentiman of the University of Alberta; Alex Massé of the University of Lethbridge; Aden Murphy of the University of Alberta; and Keith McLaughlin of the University of Lethbridge. Please give warm welcome to these students.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Edmonton's Common Ground Arts Society. Common Ground Arts Society is an organization that is less than four months old. Its goal is to celebrate the incredible artistic talent in Edmonton and to help existing organizations develop an infrastructure for emerging artists. On March 19 I had the privilege of attending their inaugural Edmonton show, a monthly showcase of local artists ranging from live musical performances and visual arts to theatre and dance. The show was hosted at the newly renovated Avenue Theatre, which is proving to be an instrumental force in the revitalization of Alberta Avenue.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Nicholas Mayne, the executive director; Patrick Lundeen, the artistic director; Simon Gorsak, the associate co-ordinator; Dawn Ringrose, the board chair; Phil Varley, the Avenue Theatre manager; Kevin McCann, a performing artist; Julie Jonas, a performing artist; Forest Mackay, a performing artist; Sarah Seburn, a visual artist; Rachel Seburn, a visual artist; and Danielle Annicchiarico, a visual artist. Please give them a warm welcome.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly the board members of the Alberta Somali Community Center. The Alberta Somali Community Center works to foster the contributions of Canadian Somalis to the multicultural fabric of Alberta. The centre aims to work with all levels of government on issues of importance to Canadian Somalis in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: the chairperson, Jama Nur; president Mahamad Accord; treasurer Abdi-Aziz Liban; vice-president Mohamed Hersi; communications director Yusuf Yusuf; membership, Jibriil Osman; secretary Saida Hussein. If you could all please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

### Members' Statements

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

#### Calgary-Montrose Awards

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to bring awareness of the Calgary-Montrose awards. For the first time in my constituency individuals will be recognized by this award. The constituency of Calgary-Montrose has been an incredible example of community at a time when it is most important. Together we have embraced safe community initiatives, worked together to make our most vulnerable supported, and moved to become more environmentally friendly to ensure we leave our children with a healthy planet.

Mr. Speaker, all individuals and organizations in east Calgary have been encouraged to nominate deserving individuals for the following awards: the Montrose student award, the Montrose youth award, the Montrose spirit award, the Montrose environmental leadership award, and the Montrose safe community award. In addition, there are three awards for organizations: the Montrose community outreach award, the Montrose environmental leadership award, and the Montrose safe community award.

I'm often inspired by the people of my constituency for their hard work and dedication not just to their own lives and to their children but to the community as a whole. Mr. Speaker, that's what makes my constituency so vibrant, and that's what makes me so proud to be their representative. I hope my constituents will consider nominating their friends and neighbours that make a difference in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### Carmangay Centennial

**Mr. McFarland:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to call Carmangay, Alberta, my home. On January 20, 1910, the village of Carmangay was formally incorporated even though it had been on the prairies since 1904. C.W. Carman had purchased a large tract of land along the Little Bow River. The village began west of the current site, but before completion of the CPR line to Carmangay those buildings had to be moved by a steam engine and horses to the current townsite. The original wood trestle, two years in construction, was one of the longest of its kind, over 1,040 feet long spanning the river coulees along the Little Bow River.

Carmangay was a growing and booming community until the great fire in 1920, which destroyed many of its businesses. Over the next seven years Carmangay slowly lost many of its remaining businesses: seven elevators became five, then three, then none. Gone are the farm machinery dealerships and fuel distributors, hardware and grocery stores, newspaper, law offices, and others, including our public school.

Today Carmangay is seeing a small resurgence in growth. It's got a wonderful long-term care/continuing care centre and has become home to many retirees and commuters. In its 100 years three of its five MLAs have been from Carmangay. Besides myself two were Speaker of this Assembly, Mr. James McNaughton and Mr. Peter Dawson.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, Carmangay was recognized for possibly having the shortest St. Patrick's Day parade in Canada, maybe the world. Each St. Patrick's day green-clad residents and visitors assemble to follow the local music from the post office one block to the Grange Hotel to have Irish coffee and green beer. All are welcome tomorrow.

This summer the formal celebration of Carmangay's centennial will take place July 30 to August 2. Many hours of volunteer work have gone into making this a year to remember for residents, former residents, family get-togethers, and their history book.

Welcome, all, and congratulations, Carmangay.

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

#### Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Right now a man is on trial for the murder of Ellie May Meyer, a young woman who died in a senseless act of violence. Ellie was, first and foremost, a human being with hopes and dreams and people who loved her. She was also a prostitute, a victim of sexual exploitation. Ellie's murder is one of 31 verified murders of vulnerable women during the last 27 years in Edmonton. Only five of those cases are solved. At least five more vulnerable women are officially listed as missing, and there could be many more.

Sexual exploitation is a common factor in these cases, and Edmontonians have organized Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week to raise understanding of the issues. Edmonton police estimate that our city could be home to 600 sexually exploited people, and there could be many more given that it's not easy to track people exploited

over the Internet, through personal ads, or escort services and massage parlours.

Ordinary people, overwhelmingly men, fuel the demand for these services. The Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton has created a campaign called stop the demand, which aims to curb sexual exploitation by reducing demand through education and awareness. Without demand there's no market for human traffickers, pimps, or profiteers. The foundation's men of honour award complement this campaign by recognizing men who encourage healthy relationships and who speak out to stop the dehumanization of the sexually exploited. I encourage everyone in Alberta to follow the example of these men of honour. We must not tolerate the victimization of vulnerable people. That starts by recognizing our common humanity with respect and compassion for all.

Thank you.

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

### Budget 2010

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9, 2010, this government tabled the 2010 budget, positioning Alberta to take full advantage of the global recovery under way. Thanks to this budget we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in Canada, the best health care system in the country, and the newest and best infrastructure in North America. This budget strikes the right balance between making spending adjustments and ensuring that priority programs are properly funded.

Others agree with the government's forecasting and budget goals. CIBC, for instance, has indicated that beyond 2010 the province is expected to average 3 per cent real GDP growth, with investment remaining a driving force. This province's fiscal performance has bettered expectations from April of 2009, and with the global recovery taking root, fiscal growth will accelerate, and we will meet our goal of being back in the black by fiscal 2012-2013. CIBC also points out that the sustainability fund is coming to good use, having been established to cushion volatility in the resource sector to avoid painful program cuts.

Critics continue to call for less spending and, without basis, state that Alberta's 2010 budget is bad for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 continues to provide priority of services for Albertans. We will monitor our spending and our revenues to ensure that we meet our targets and the Premier's goal of being back in the black by 2012. That's responsible fiscal management. That's reasonable budgeting. That's what a responsible government does. It strikes the right balance.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to later table the CIBC provincial budget brief dated February 9, 2010.

Thank you.

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

### Homelessness Initiatives

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak this afternoon about the progress being made to help vulnerable Albertans break the cycle of homelessness. Today is the first anniversary of our government's commitment to end homelessness in our province. Alberta's plan is based on a housing first approach whereby permanent, safe housing is provided along with the supports and services needed to break the cycle of homelessness. This model increases the likelihood that the individual will reach independence and is a more cost-effective way to co-ordinate and maximize resources.

Mr. Speaker, few jurisdictions are immune to the problem of homelessness, and fewer still have a plan of action to address it. In fact, Alberta remains the only province in Canada to put a 10-year plan to end homelessness into motion.

There are as many causes of homelessness beyond those that first come to mind: mental health problems, substance abuse issues, and others. Illness, family breakdown, or job loss can often result in temporary homelessness, and the economic downturn has brought the tipping point of homelessness much closer to some.

But one year after endorsing Canada's only 10-year plan to end homelessness, our province is a better place for so many who previously had little hope. Today more than 1,300 formerly homeless people have a place to call home and the help that they need to remain housed and become independent, shelter use is declining in all major centres – and this is a good thing, Mr. Speaker – and more than 900 housing units for the homeless are being supported across our province. These are encouraging results.

The reality is that we still have homeless people on our streets, and we still have people in need of basic housing. In our world of technological and social change belonging somewhere remains a basic human need.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to offer my thanks to all the stakeholders, which include the government of Alberta, community volunteers, professionals serving the homeless, and private-sector investors, who have made a difference in this particular area. Thank you.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Long-term Care in Grande Prairie

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday I asked the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports why the long-term care centre promised to Grande Prairie in 2006 has not been started. She could not provide an answer. She also could not say what happened to the \$2.3 million that was given to Chantelle Management to start this facility. To the Premier: why has \$2.3 million of taxpayer money been sitting in Chantelle Management's bank accounts for four years, and construction has still not started?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to seniors' housing in the province of Alberta we are moving forward with a very aggressive plan to add to the number of living spaces in the province. We want to make sure that seniors can retire in the very same community that they helped build. We're reviewing all of the applications that have come forward for funding, and we'll make decisions on them soon.

**Dr. Swann:** To the Premier. It has been four years. Is the province going to ask for that \$2.3 million to be returned with interest or not?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I can get additional information on that particular issue, but overall in terms of increasing the number of spaces, we're looking at at least 800 to 900 spaces. We've been told that with the increasing population in years to come, we would need about 1,200 spaces every year to keep up with the pace of growth in what you'd call the baby-boomer generation, that will be retiring within a number of years.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, I'm sure the people of Grande Prairie will be very interested in that lack of an answer, Mr. Premier. How do you expect to build trust in a population where you neither answer a question nor have a serious response to 2.3 million public dollars absent from our agenda?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, what is going on in Grande Prairie right now with Chantelle developments is a very important project not only to the people of Grande Prairie but to us. We are in the process right now of learning that they have managed to get all their building permits and to get their contract with Alberta Health Services, and they will be starting the project within the next two months.

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

#### Centralized Cytology Lab Services

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One theme that's clear within this government is that there's no long-term plan for health care, including lab services. This past weekend I was in Lethbridge, and the resounding concern related to the impending closure of their cytology lab. To the Premier: why is the Premier closing a lab in Lethbridge which performs necessary tests for cervical cancer?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the minister recently met with the pathologists, and he'll have more information with respect the results of the meeting. We're working with Alberta Health Services to deliver the best quality of services with the pathologists in the province.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we've spoken to pathologists and to public health officials, and they're puzzled also. What's the evidence the Premier can table in the House to show that this change will improve both the timeliness and accuracy of the testing for cervical cancer?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to undertake that follow-up on behalf of the questioner and on behalf of the Premier. The fact is that it's just the analysis of the Pap smears or whatever services are being alluded to here that are being centralized. They are being sent somewhere, in this case probably to Calgary, so that the turnaround time can be faster, and that's what we're working toward, making the whole system more efficient. But I will look more deeply into that on behalf of the member.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, for such a significant issue it's surprising that the minister is only now looking into this issue. How is it going to save time or money to send all the Pap smears from Lethbridge to Calgary?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, it could well be the case that Alberta Health Services has put in place some additional precautionary steps to make sure that it will be more efficient, to make sure that the turnaround time is faster. This is not an issue of contracting things out; this is an issue of working within the publicly provided system, which is exactly what this cytology analysis lab is in Calgary.

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

#### Erotic Massage Parlours

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The time has come for Alberta to take a strong stand in the battle against sexual exploitation. This government should cut through the confusion, strengthen the laws, pursue prosecution, go after the gangs, support the victims, and educate the public about the issues. To the Minister of Justice: in order to decrease victimization and sexual exploitation, will the

minister and this government develop legislation that will address the proliferation of sexual massage parlours?

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue is important to all Albertans, and I want to commend the member on his statement today with respect to this issue. We in Alberta Justice and, indeed, this government take this issue very seriously. We believe that it's about more than criminal prosecutions, and by that I don't mean that we're not prosecuting. What we are doing is supporting projects like Project Kare, which are integrated investigative teams that include senior counsel, senior investigators who are ensuring that we're able to resolve these cold cases.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to be in a province where we don't need Project Kare. That's way too many victims. We want to stop the victims from turning up in the streets of this city.

Will this minister work with municipalities, police, health officials, and other stakeholders to develop provincial standards that enable Alberta municipalities to better establish, investigate, and prosecute bylaws related to adult entertainment and sexual services?

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the pieces of work that we've worked on very closely with police agencies in this province in the last two years is to ensure that their investigative teams are looking not only at what particular acts may be involved in running businesses such as massage parlours but also the environment, the actual, factual environment as to how people are functioning in these businesses so that they're not exploited. We believe it's very important to ensure that we're creating a system where people are talking about this, understanding this, investigating this, and prosecuting.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. Well, that sounds like a step in the right direction. Again to the same minister: given the power of public awareness and opinion, will the minister support a broader educational program about the risks and victims of sexual exploitation aimed at the demographic groups most likely to use these services?

**Ms Redford:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very good suggestion. We've certainly done a lot of work around this through the safe communities innovation fund. Just this evening one of our Crown prosecutors will be at the library speaking to victim sexual exploitation online. We'll continue to do that work, and I'm happy to work with the member on that.

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

#### Postsecondary Tuition Fees

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the government committed to implementing a tuition fee calculation policy that capped tuition increases at the rate of inflation for a 10-year period. In November 2009 the minister announced that postsecondary institutions could submit proposals requesting tuition increases for professional faculties. This goes against the very commitment this government made to ease the financial burden on students. My questions are to the Premier. Why did your government's promise to postsecondary students by removing the tuition fee increase policy for legislation . . .

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, if I could correct the preamble, this government did not request proposals from the postsecondaries. The postsecondaries indicated to us that there was a problem with some of their tuition levels in 2004, when we froze tuition rates. All we did was indicate to them that we would entertain receiving those proposals. We have done that. We've had meetings with the students. Some of the institutions have had numerous meetings with the students. We're going to continue to look at those proposals as they come forward.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you. Given that postsecondary tuition in Alberta is already the third highest in Canada, will the government stay true to their word and support increases based on the consumer price index per year only?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear in my response to the CPI cap as being protected. However, if there were issues around errors that were made under that program back in 2004, I think it's prudent for the taxpayer and for the students to be able to look at that so that we can protect the CPI cap going forward.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that students build plans around policy – they are able to work, save, and get financial support based on government policy – what is the point in passing this policy if you're going to ignore the rules that you've already put in place?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be advantageous if the hon. member would listen to the answers rather than just go back to the script of the question. This is exactly what I've said. We are honouring the policy of the CPI. However, in order to ensure that that CPI is there for the rest of the period of time, we want to make sure that we correct the errors in it so that we don't have to go back and revisit it. We've said very clearly to the postsecondaries: this is a one-time adjustment only. We're not talking about changing across the board. We're not talking about any of those other things, simply correcting an error, which I believe this hon. member would agree is a good thing to do.

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

2:00

### Oil and Gas Royalties

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier announced his new royalty framework in 2007, he said that it's "good, it's sound, and it's going to carry this province well into the next century." Wow, that went by fast: 2100 already. Why did the Premier abandon his commitment to a fair share for Albertans just three years later?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the oil sands royalty changes are working very well; in fact, billions of dollars of new investment. There have been changing circumstances with respect to the market for natural gas, especially given the new finds of shale gas, which leads to the need for more innovation and investment in technology. It would have been a real mistake not to revisit this particular area to make sure that we attract the same investment we've had before the market conditions changed.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that on the same day in 2007, the Premier said that this "framework was put in place to provide certainty and predictability," and given that the Premier has rolled back royalties seven times since then, why won't the Premier admit that the only certainty he's provided Albertans is that he can't be counted on to stand up for their interests?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, since the royalty framework was introduced in 2007 to take effect in 2009, we have seen major changes with respect to the marketplace: huge finds in shale gas, a world economic crisis, a credit crisis that many companies face. But the biggest issue, though, for so many companies was that natural gas dropped down to that \$3 level. We were losing production, the tariffs on moving gas to the United States almost doubled from what they were before, and as a result we were losing production, which led to less gas being produced and less ethane and less polyethylene produced in the province of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the NDP is the only party standing up for the majority of Albertans, who want fair share royalties, and given that both the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals have changed their position on this issue so many times that you need a program to keep track and given that the Wildrose Alliance is supported by the oil and gas industry precisely to fight for lower royalties, why won't the Premier admit that his government has betrayed Albertans who voted for him based on his promise to raise royalty rates?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there is a partnership that exists between the government, Albertans, who are owners of the resource, and also those investors that put billions of dollars at risk in searching for the resources of natural gas and conventional oil. I believe that what we've gone through over the last six to seven months was a good process which has led to a good policy, and that policy has been supported by industry, by government, by others who have invested billions of dollars in a basin that is depleting. We need innovation to access new gas.

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

### Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night I attended CAPP in Calgary with many colleagues of this Assembly. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore joined me. In a speech to a thousand people the Minister of Energy mentioned that he consulted with only 68 MLAs. My question to the Minister of Energy is: does he know how many MLAs there are in this Assembly representing all Albertans?

**Mr. Liepert:** I think the last time I counted, Mr. Speaker, it was 83.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm one of those 83, and I'm very proud as an independent to represent the economic engine of Canada that provides lots of revenue to the minister of finance, who is smiling. My question is: why did the minister exclude from the competitiveness review the oil sands, the economic engine that creates so many jobs for Albertans?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, probably because, if the member actually would think about it for a minute, the royalty framework that the Premier referred to has been working very well as it relates to oil sands royalties, and there was no need to review it.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Energy: isn't it true that new political forces and pressures from this very Assembly are what forced this government to do the right thing in treating Albertans fairly, in creating jobs? [interjections]

**Mr. Liepert:** No, it's not, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Boutilier:** I still have the floor, Mr. Speaker, don't I?

**The Speaker:** I'm sorry. Hon. member, sit down. Read the document you signed about preambles. Okay?

**Mr. Boutilier:** No response?

**The Speaker:** There was a response.  
The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

#### **Postsecondary Tuition Fees** (continued)

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to properly fund the postsecondary system is causing institutions to look at charging students non tuition-related fees of \$500 or more to fill their financial shortfalls. In Alberta, however, students already have the third highest tuition in the country according to Stats Canada. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: can the minister explain why he thinks students should do the job of this government, which is to provide sustainable funding for the postsecondary education system?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, postsecondary education in the province of Alberta is a partnership between the taxpayer and the students. We have always maintained that an investment in one's future is an investment in education, probably the best investment they're going to make in their lifetime. So it's a partnership. I would say that the CPI cap, which we talked about, is a good way to move forward. Other provinces are removing their caps. We're keeping ours. I would say that in my discussions with the students over the course of this week as it relates to ancillary fees, we're going to continue that discussion.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't the minister move to provide sensible regulations for mandatory fees by limiting the amount that fees can be increased, requiring consultation with students, and ensuring that students aren't being charged extra fees for basic educational services?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the hon. member isn't listening to what the students probably have told him. We met just the other day, and we talked about that very thing. We are looking at and discussing with postsecondaries how we might be able to deal with one-time issues around IT costs, around various things that aren't necessarily with regard to instruction but might be something that the institution might want to look at in terms of its fixed assets or in terms of supports for students.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I met with the students this morning, and one of their concerns was having a referendum on all increases so that students would actually have a say in their fees.

Will the minister admit that his government's tuition cap policy is meaningless if institutions can simply raise noninstructional fees by unlimited amounts?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, currently there are regulations in place that do limit some of the noninstructional fees that institutions can levy. We are, as I said, working with the students and the postsecondary institutions to talk about how we might build some fences, if you will, around things that are outside of those regulations. To suggest that we're moving away from the policy that we've had before is ridiculous.

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

#### **Homelessness Initiatives**

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. One year ago today Alberta endorsed a 10-year plan to end homelessness. Alberta is one year and several million dollars into the plan, and we still have people living on the streets. Why does Alberta think it will succeed in any homelessness plan when other jurisdictions have failed?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has made, in fact, a bold commitment to end homelessness as we know it. I fully believe that we can do this. When fully implemented, the 10-year plan to end homelessness will ensure that individuals who present themselves to a shelter will be channelled into permanent housing within 21 days. At the same time, I'd indicate that it's also important to note that this program, unlike any others in any other province, partners with nonprofit organizations throughout the province, who know how to stretch the dollars even further than the government.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness has concluded that it's going to cost more than \$3 billion to end homelessness in Alberta over the next 10 years, how can you be sure that the costs will not get out of hand?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I share the same concern about costs. In the previous budgetary year there was an increase in spending in this department. This year there was a 19 per cent decrease in spending in our department, over \$100 million. Why? Because over the last three years we completed a three-year plan to transfer \$100 million in each of these years to municipalities. At the same time, we realize that we've completed this plan, and we have to move forward with other plans, including being compassionate to the taxpayer.



2:10

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Several members have recently heard from communities that oppose certain affordable and homeless housing projects in their neighbourhoods. What is the minister doing to address some of the community concerns?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. This member raises an important issue about community engagement. It is important, actually, to consult in the communities where affordable housing goes, but at the same time we also have to consider that we don't want to just concentrate affordable housing in one particular neighbourhood but, rather, spread it throughout the city, give people some dignity and actually integrate it into the community at large. That's in the best interests of the taxpayer and those people who are in affordable housing.

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

#### Environmental Impact Assessments

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has created a catch-22 in the competitiveness review. It is extremely vague on expectations for changes in environmental regulations, yet only a 90-day period is allowed for a response from the task force on how changes are supposed to take place, so no detail, no context, but make changes in 90 days. To the Minister of Environment: is there support for increased funding for environmental impact assessments on the front end? If the government is serious about increasing development in the oil and gas sector, this is where the system bottlenecks.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday we talked about the role that Alberta Environment will play in the regulatory review. The member brings forward a very important point. The whole issue of how we conduct an environmental assessment I think has to be considered in the context of whether or not we are making unnecessary duplication. I do think that that's an area that we would like to move forward on to look at how we do environmental assessments in that context.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Is the minister saying that he's looking at downgrading the environmental impact assessments or somehow lessening the requirements for them?

**Mr. Renner:** No. I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, that if you do things the same way, you should probably expect the same outcomes. We would like to improve our outcomes. So I'm saying that there may be opportunities for us to do environmental assessments from the perspective of determining what is more global in nature. Can we have 15 volumes of data that are generated in environmental assessment that are more generic in nature and then concentrate our efforts on those aspects of that environmental assessment that would apply to any particular application and do that in more detail?

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: what is the factual basis for stating in the review that there can be cost savings without negatively impacting the environment?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, I gave her a very good example yesterday when I talked about the fact that we can avoid unnecessary duplication. The line of questioning that we just were in is a very good example. Is it necessary to do over and over and over again environmental assessments that cover the same information? Or should we, in fact, be concentrating our energies on those aspects of that assessment that pertain to an individual application and enhancing the amount of background and research information for those aspects rather than duplicating over and over multiple kinds of information that's not necessary?

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

#### Queen Elizabeth II Highway Intersections

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has been spending a great deal of money in the last few years on ring roads and intersections to improve traffic safety in urban areas. Queen Elizabeth II highway also is becoming extremely busy between Edmonton and Calgary, at times up to 30,000 vehicles per day on this road. Neither the road nor the intersections have been designed for this volume of traffic. My question to the Minister of Transportation: what are we doing to ensure the efficiency and the safety of the travelling public on the QE II highway?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always looking to improve our highways and improve motorist safety at the same time. As for highway 2 we've built some new interchanges during the past few years and have upgraded a number of others. It's all part of a plan to eventually turn highway 2 into a freeway, which means that access will be via interchanges only. This really improves safety as interchanges are the safest way to enter or exit a highway.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how can you improve the safety of the old cloverleaf-style intersections?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one way to do that is by converting these into what are called diamond interchanges. The diamond interchange is a much more modern design and handles higher traffic counts. A diamond provides longer and straighter entrance and exit ramps, with better visibility for the merging traffic. It also allows drivers to merge into traffic at highway speed, which is both safer and more efficient. We converted the north Innisfail interchange into a diamond last year, and we'll convert the highway 11A interchange at Red Deer into a diamond this year.

**Mr. Prins:** My last question is: when are you going to do the one at Lacombe and Ponoka?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we convert those old cloverleafs into diamonds as fast as we possibly can and when the traffic volume at that particular intersection triggers it. I mentioned the highway 11 interchange in my second answer, but there's a lot more to come. In our three-year program we're going to convert interchanges at Red Deer, Ponoka, Olds, and Wetaskiwin. I'm confident this will greatly improve the safety on the QE II.

### Kainai Community Correctional Centre

**Mr. Hehr:** Mr. Speaker, the Kainai community corrections facility, the only correctional facility in the province established for aboriginal inmates, is being closed, and the reason given by the Solicitor General is that there are not enough minimum security aboriginal inmates available to use this facility. To the Solicitor General: now that we had an opportunity to discuss this last week, is it still your assertion that Kainai community corrections is closing because of a lack of minimum security aboriginal inmates in Alberta in need of its services?

**Mr. Oberle:** Actually, just to correct the preamble, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe I said that the reason that we are closing it is because of a lack of minimum security inmates. That is one issue. I also indicated, I think rather clearly, that we have a budgetary issue, and we also have services available in other locations. If the member would like to attend my estimates tonight, I'll be discussing this in more detail.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if you check *Hansard* from last week, you can refer to your answer there, where it did say that you had a lack of aboriginal inmates for the facility.

Nonetheless, on March 8 the Kainai correctional centre received notice that the Lethbridge Correctional Centre was holding 19 male and 15 female aboriginal inmates that were classified as minimum security. Why were these aboriginal inmates not serving time in the Kainai correctional centre, located a mere, short distance away?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, again to correct the preamble, Mr. Speaker, I most certainly didn't say that there was a lack of aboriginal inmates. That's what he said in his second preamble. I did say that the inmate population was changing, and there are less minimum security inmates in our inmate population today. If the member would care to get his facts straight, we could get to a question.

**Mr. Hehr:** Okay. Fair enough. So if we have less minimum security inmates, we have a few more medium security inmates. We have this facility that's being used for aboriginal inmates. Why aren't we using more of this facility to house aboriginal inmates in medium security? Can't you use your powers to make this happen?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I was asked that question before, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the hon. member that the facility is not ours. It's a lease program, a contracted services arrangement. The facility is not ours, and it's not up to me to reconstruct it, and I don't have funds to do that. So we're seeking solutions elsewhere.

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

### Alberta Economic Development Authority

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this Legislature the Minister of Finance and Enterprise tabled the annual report for the Alberta Economic Development Authority, which was created in 1994 for the purpose of bringing together business and government to identify areas where we may enhance our competitiveness and facilitate economic growth and prosperity. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. In what way does the Alberta Economic Development Authority provide input to you and your department for policy development and strategies?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-North Hill is correct. Last year represented the 15th anniversary for the Alberta Economic Development Authority, and last week I had the pleasure of tabling its annual report. Over those 15 years AEDA, as its acronym is, has provided us very valuable policy input on a variety of policy topics, ranging from carbon capture and storage, productivity, competitiveness, sustainable water management, and most recently broadband. All of these address the question of growing prosperity for the people of Alberta.

2:20

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer AEDA presented the government with its report *Restoring Fiscal Balance: Input for Budget 2010*. What recommendations in that report were used as priorities for the development of the 2010 budget?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill is correct. AEDA did provide us advice on the budget for the upcoming year. In the wake of the economic collapse of 2008-09 we looked to the business community for advice on sound fiscal management and coming out of the recession. Three very specific recommendations they gave us were: we had to cut spending to reduce the deficit, but also they told us not to cut critical services, and that was reflected in our budget; they told us to take a cautious approach to issuing bonds; and finally they told us to focus on competitiveness, which explains why we have Bill 1.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental to the same minister: as we move forward with Budget 2010 and subsequent budgets and achieving the goal of our Premier to be back in the black by 2012, will the Alberta Economic Development Authority continue to play a role in policy input?

**Dr. Morton:** The answer, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely yes. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is one of the key initiatives of the government to get Albertans working again and to become globally competitive. I've met with the AEDA board, and I anticipate they'll play a very co-operative role in developing the policies that come out of Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

### Funding for Homelessness Initiatives

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight years ago the public was outraged when Ralph Klein threw money at a homeless person in a shelter. Upon reflection, at least he was giving money instead of taking it away. This government pretends it wants to end homelessness, but they fail to implement rent controls, they've cut funding to rent supplement programs, and overall they've cut a hundred million dollars from housing. How can the housing minister tell this Assembly that they're going to end homelessness any time soon when the government is actually cutting funding?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I get to the meat of the question, I want to thank the member for her comments. We may have some different partisan views from time to time, but we have the same goal, and that is ending homelessness as we know it.

Looking forward, we are on track. If you look at our spending now versus the last few years, while we have cut spending this year, we have actually grossly increased spending to ensure that we are actually going to make the 10-year target to end homelessness.

**Ms Notley:** Well, given that the government has cut \$200 million from affordable housing, actually reduced planned affordable housing units by about 800 this year alone, and cut funding for rent support, wouldn't it be more honest for the minister to begin each housing announcement with an apology to the Albertans who are becoming homeless as we speak because this government keeps cutting money from them?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, if anybody owes an apology, it's this member for just insinuating dishonesty in this Chamber.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at the same budget documents that everyone else has in this Assembly, so given that a year ago . . .

**The Speaker:** Please, sit down. We know that it's customary that the day that the budget for a particular department is being raised in this Assembly, we don't ask questions about it. So frame your question and go forward with the third, please, because his budget is coming up tonight.

**Ms Notley:** Given that a year ago the then housing minister said that she fully endorsed the \$3.3 billion plan although was only prepared to fund one-third of it and given that so far every dollar for homelessness has been taken away from the affordable housing initiatives, why won't the minister admit that this government is merely robbing from poor and almost homeless Peter to pay already homeless Paul?

**Mr. Denis:** I didn't really keep track of all of the names between Ralph and Peter and Paul there. But, Mr. Speaker, moving forward, we are the only government in Canada, including provinces governed by NDP regimes, that has a 10-year plan to end homelessness. The Premier is sticking to this. This government is sticking to this.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

### **Erotic Massage Parlours** (continued)

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Erotic massage parlours in Alberta are incubators for sexual exploitation and human trafficking. The victims are the sex workers, who are often coerced and entrapped by pimps, profiteers, and gangs. They are treated as if they are barely human. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Will the minister and his department investigate the number and welfare of foreign workers working in sexual massage parlours in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member brings up an issue that I think is important to all of us in this House. Just

like our Justice minister, I would look forward to working with this member on ideas on how we can address this very important issue. But just to let you know, in our most recent federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting the issue of identifying sex trade worker smugglers has been very high on the Canadian agenda. As a matter of fact, my department right now is training our front-line staff on how to identify situations where we suspect individuals have been brought in from abroad for the purpose of sex trade.

**Dr. Taft:** Great. Actually, that program is a good step in the right direction.

My next question is to the Solicitor General. Given that prevention is far better than treatment, will the minister use some of the \$47 million surplus in the victims of crime fund to support the sex workers who are victimized in massage parlours with a program to help them escape from that business?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we will work with all victims of crime in allocating that victims of crime fund. The member will know that we want to maintain some sort of a surplus there so that we can ensure the sustainability of that fund. But we'll certainly look at the proposal.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. I appreciate that.

My next question then is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the health risks of sexual massage parlours, including the spreading of diseases like syphilis, which is on the increase in this province, will the minister direct his public health officials to use their full authority to clamp down on massage parlours as a public health risk?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister of Employment and Immigration through his staff provide related health coverage or health services or something to that effect. I'll discuss it with him, and we'll figure out where it should go.

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

### **Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers**

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently there have been stories about certain doctors saying that they have been told that they are not allowed to speak to the media about certain health issues. I constantly seek out feedback from my constituents using our health care system and from my constituents who are the front-line staff of the system. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. As an elected representative who highly values feedback and suggestions, I want to know if there has been a directive from anywhere within the health system that would constrain doctors or any other front-line staff from speaking out about health-related issues.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge there hasn't been any no-talk order issued, certainly not by me, certainly by no one in Alberta Health and Wellness, and to the best of my knowledge neither from anyone within Alberta Health Services. In fact, openness and transparency are two very important hallmarks of our government, and I'll ensure that that's carried through. AHS likely has had some conversations with respect to the so-called code of conduct issue to ensure that trust, accountability, respect, and transparency are reflected.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if that is the case, then why did certain cancer doctors in Calgary say that they are not allowed to speak to the media?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know what might have prompted anyone to say that. I was recently with the Alberta Medical Association as well as with the United Nurses of Alberta heads, and we talked about various issues related to code of conduct. They seemed to be pretty understanding and relatively pleased with the new code of conduct that has been put in place. So we'll just make sure that it's working as effectively as it should because physicians must feel free to comment on medical issues any time they wish.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. If there is no gag order in effect, then what can you do to ensure that all doctors and, for that matter, nurses and perhaps others are aware of this fact?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if there is any uncertainty – and certain stories in the media would lead us to believe that there is – we're going to clear that up in a hurry because nurses, doctors, and perhaps others need to feel free to comment on medically related issues as they might impact services that they are providing or as they impact services Albertans are receiving.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### 2:30 Construction and Manufacturing Outsourcing

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred very large production modules for Imperial Oil's Kearl oil sands project will be built in South Korea. Substantial job losses here in Alberta will result from this deal. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Is exporting construction jobs offshore the cheapest way for Imperial Oil to construct its Kearl oil sands project here in Alberta?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, I should start by saying that not only creating jobs but keeping Albertans employed and creating an environment in which businesses can stimulate employment is this ministry's and this government's number one priority. However, individual companies within this province make business decisions based on cost models or availability of production skills or other variables that this government does not monitor. One of the differences between this government and perhaps governments in different parts of the world is that we don't tell people how to run businesses.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of unemployment: what is the total value of the work being done in South Korea, and how many person-hours of work have been lost here in Alberta in the construction and steel-fabricating industries?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if this question is appropriately addressed to me. He should contact the employer and find out. This government is not in the business of business. We don't tell businesses how to run businesses in Alberta. However, we are in the role of making sure that there are workers available in the province, and we always make sure to hire Albertans first, the rest of Canadians second, and then, when you can't find them, export abroad.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of unemployment: how can steel fabricators here in Alberta compete fairly and on a level economic playing field against South Korean manufacturers who have access to cheap, subsidized steel and steel products? How can industries here compete? How can you allow that?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess welcome to the real world would be my answer to this question. The fact is that he identifies a very good point. Alberta is immersed in a global economy. We compete not only against other provinces and states but also against the world, and our job is to make sure that our employers have well-trained and skilled workers in this province. However, that doesn't mean that they will not export some jobs or import workers to this province. It's a world economy, we're functioning in it, and it is our role as government to make us as competitive as possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and then maybe the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### School Construction and Renovation

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. There is a large backlog in deferred maintenance of schools, and with classroom space becoming critical in some areas of the province, what is the minister planning to do to address the student space issue and the maintenance backlog when there are no new projects in the 2010-11 budget?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, while it's important to note that there are not any new announced projects in the budget, there are 101 major new or major refurbishing projects under way as we speak or in planning which will start shortly, so there is a significant amount of work happening. The 101 projects will see the creation of more than 30,000 new student spaces and the refurbishment of a considerable amount of space that's out there now. We're putting about \$550 million into renewal of our school system.

**Mr. Benito:** My final question is to the same minister. I understand that more than half of the capital budget is going towards schools in Edmonton and Calgary. With Alberta's student population continuing to grow, what is this budget doing to address the school infrastructure pressure in the rest of the province, particularly in the communities outside the urban areas?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, of the 101 projects that I spoke of, 58 of those projects are in jurisdictions outside the metro area. The work is being done, yes, to create with the ASAP 1 and 2 projects new spaces primarily in Edmonton and Calgary and the immediately surrounding areas. That's where the majority of growth is happening. There are other growth areas that we need to pay attention to, but there's a significant amount of work being done to keep up and to improve the school infrastructure right across this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

### Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment and Immigration stated that his number one priority is that every

Albertans leaves home in the morning and comes back to his or her family safe at the end of the workday. In 2008, the last reported year, 23 people died as a result of farm incidents and 19 the year before. These are Albertans who left for work but didn't return home. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why is the minister content taking no action to protect paid farm workers?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the fact that my number one priority is to make sure that every worker leaves their home, be it in the morning, and comes home healthy and, obviously, alive at the end of the day. That is my number one priority. It's heart wrenching when I read about accident reports when, unfortunately, something has happened. We're not in the business of pointing fingers. This is a collaboration between employers, employees, and this government to make sure that we have as safe a workplace as possible.

Now, dealing with farms, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** I'm afraid we're going on.

**Ms Pastoor:** Given that occupational health and safety legislation increases monitoring and safety in the workplace, which leads to decreased injury and health in every other workplace, when will the minister change the legislation to include paid farm workers?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, I must brag on behalf of our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. He has just significantly increased funding for safety training throughout the Alberta agricultural community. Under the auspices of this department WCB coverage is available to farm workers if they choose to avail themselves of WCB coverage on farms. That has always been available. But we are looking at a balance. Most farming in this province still happens on family farms, where people actually live, not only work.

**Ms Pastoor:** Given that the farm accident monitoring system is voluntary and that, as a result, farm injuries are widely underreported, how can the effectiveness of the farm safety education programs be accurately determined to ensure that that \$715,000 is well used?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, we are monitoring all injuries that are employment related on farms. But this member actually brings up a very good point, perhaps unintentionally. The fact of the matter is that if an accident happens on a farm, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a work-related accident. People actually live on farms; they play on farms. Those are not only places of employment, so not all accidents that occur on a family farm are farming related.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

### Highway 27 Interchange

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. The minister has repeatedly stated in this Assembly that the safety of Albertans on Alberta roads is his highest priority, yet the overpass on the QE II at highway 27 no longer meets today's standards as far as access or exit lanes are concerned. Earlier today he spoke of turning cloverleafs into diamonds on other locations on the QE II. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. When is he going to offer me a diamond and turn this very important intersection into a much safer road?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, had the hon. member been paying attention to the answer that I gave earlier to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, he would know that we intend to upgrade this

interchange. So I'll repeat myself. Converting this cloverleaf to the diamond design is on our three-year construction plan. The conversion won't happen this year, but it will be done in either 2011 or 2012.

**Mr. Marz:** I apologize for not hearing the minister earlier because he's so soft spoken.

To the minister: is the bridge structure going to be replaced as part of this new plan, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, the current bridge structure will be used as part of the upgraded interchange. The bridge may be modified or added onto, but we're certainly going to utilize it. The bridge is still in very good shape, and I don't think this province's taxpayers would appreciate us ripping out a perfectly good bridge.

**Mr. Marz:** Again to the Minister of Transportation: how many more years of estimated life does the current bridge structure have, and is it economical to wait longer?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that interchange was built in 1966, and our bridges have a life expectancy of 75 to 80 years, so there are at least 30 to 40 years left in that bridge if we did nothing to it. As part of the conversion to the diamond the modifications to the bridge may extend the life expectancy even further. I can assure this member that we're going to do the best for his constituents.

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

### 2:40 Forest Industry Competitiveness

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The forest industry is very important to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and to many other constituencies around this province. While the industry has gone through some tough times, I recently read in the AFPA news release that shipments of forest products to the United States are up. Will this mean increased employment in the mills in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that in many of the 50-plus communities in the province of Alberta where there is a reliance on this industry, it is good news, and it very likely will increase the number of hours and shifts that are worked at mills in the province of Alberta, but it goes much farther than that. As a matter of fact, we need to continue to work with the industry to broaden the issues around the use of fibre, generally speaking, in bioenergy, the possibility of fuel production, diversification into petrochemicals, and fuel products.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** To the same minister. With the Canadian dollar rising, what's your opinion: how will this negatively impact the Alberta forest sector?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, I think it goes without saying that there are many factors around the pressure that's on the forest industry today. However, one of the things that's been very negative to any of our commodity production sectors is the fact that the Canadian dollar is strengthening, and as it comes closer and closer, of course, to parity, our market possibilities and our competitiveness in international markets begin to decrease.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Again to the same minister: will this minister commit to working with the federal government to secure an increased market share for Alberta in the American market?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, we do have international trade agreements around the issues, one of them, of course, relative to softwood lumber. I don't believe that in the long term that's necessarily the key for us. I do understand the importance of the U.S. market, but I believe that it's incumbent on us to work with the federal government not only on those issues but on issues that allow us to expand the markets of those commodities and the products from Alberta to other places in the world that are receptive to those types of products.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. In total, we had 118 questions and answers. Twenty different members were recognized: nine Official Opposition Liberal members, one Wildrose Alliance member, two New Democratic members, one independent member, and seven Progressive Conservative members.

We'll continue with the Routine in 15 seconds from now.

### Members' Statements

*(continued)*

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

### Postsecondary Tuition Fees

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008, after consultation with postsecondary students and elected student representatives, the Premier and the government committed to capping tuition fee increases to the consumer price index, CPI, until 2016. In 2009 the Premier wrote to the council of university students.

My government continues to support initiatives contained in the Affordability Framework, including the Tuition Fee Policy. The Government of Alberta would not consider revising the Tuition Fee Policy without consulting with key stakeholders such as the student organizations that you represent.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, the Premier broke this promise just two months later and announced that universities and colleges could submit proposals to hike tuitions for professional faculties across this province. Currently tuition fees in Alberta are the third highest in Canada, and for many students the cost of postsecondary education is becoming unaffordable.

This creates a big problem for many Albertans. Students must work hard to get good grades and to make the most of the very important investment that Alberta's taxpayers make in our education and advanced education systems. All educators must do their best to make sure that students are performing and that we truly do provide them with a world-class education.

The proposed increases create even more uncertainty for the families and students that have made financial sacrifices based on the government's promise to cap tuition increases. Given that this government has introduced legislation to make Alberta more competitive, wouldn't it make sense to look ahead and make the postsecondary system more competitive as well?

Mr. Speaker, we all know that a good postsecondary education will be key to the success of Alberta in an increasingly competitive global market. On behalf of students across this province I challenge the government to keep its promise and maintain the current tuition increases to the CPI until 2016 and allow all Albertans the opportunity for affordable and accessible postsecondary education.

### Introduction of Bills

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

### Bill 10

#### Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This act has been a successful tool to date in suppressing crime and making Alberta communities safer. The civil forfeiture process has allowed us to disrupt street-level drug dealing and residential marijuana grow operations. We've also been able to seize property derived from illegal acts, which will be used to compensate victims affected by these crimes.

The amendments we are proposing will allow us to broaden the scope of our act in accordance with recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada. These proposed amendments are aimed at making it easier to restrain and dispose of property and proceeds tainted by crime and to help compensate public bodies such as municipalities who shoulder the costs of criminal activity.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

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

### Bill 11

#### Witness Security Act

**Mr. Drysdale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act.

This legislation will establish a provincial witness security program in Alberta. Investigating and prosecuting gang-related crimes is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in cases when individuals are unwilling to come forward and give evidence because they fear retaliation. Alberta's Witness Security Act will provide short-term protective services to witnesses who agree to give evidence; for example, in gang-related investigations and particularly homicides. This legislation will complement the federal witness protection program, which addresses the needs of witnesses who require longer term protection and identity changes. Alberta's law enforcement agencies and the Crown are working extremely hard to reduce gang activity and deserve every tool possible to do their jobs.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

### Bill 12

#### Body Armour Control Act

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act.

The proposed legislation would allow police to seize body armour from individuals who do not have a permit for its legitimate use.

Police officers, peace officers, emergency medical service providers, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission inspectors, licensed private security guards, and others who need to wear body armour to do their jobs will be exempt from the requirement to get a permit. Individuals holding a valid firearms permit will also be exempt. Other individuals may be issued a permit on the basis that they have legitimate occupational or personal safety reasons to wear body armour.

2:50

The goal of this proposed legislation is to restrict the ability of violent criminals and known gang members to possess body armour while ensuring that law-abiding Albertans have access to this equipment for occupational or personal safety reasons.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the report from the CIBC titled Provincial Budget Briefs, dated February 9, 2010.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received from one of my constituents, Deanna Kayne. She's concerned with the high cost of postsecondary education. She notes that to pay for education, students must either have the support of a wealthy family or incur a substantial debt that could take decades to pay off.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 28 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Webber, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act, the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2009 annual report.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Bills and Orders

##### Second Reading

##### Bill 1

##### Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Debate adjourned March 11]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to continue the debate.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, the government's apparent showpiece piece of legislation in this particular session of the Alberta Legislature, although it's not much of a show.

This is a pretty thin bill, and I mean that literally and figuratively. It is only three pages long. Even at that I'm quite surprised that we needed to go three pages and cut down the requisite number of trees to essentially produce a bill as Bill 1 that does nothing more than allow for the establishment of a board or a committee with a vague mandate for increasing competitiveness. I have been in this Legislature now for, I think, five and a half years – that would, I guess, be six years of spring sessions – and this is the flimsiest, most vague Bill 1 that I have seen so far.

I don't really understand the point of this bill, Mr. Speaker. I don't really understand the purpose of this bill. There is no reference in the bill as to when completion or action of benchmarks and goals will take place, nor is there any reference to any specific action that will be taken now. It seems to me that all this bill does is kind of legislate an idea: well, we should be more competitive, and we should set up a committee to figure out how we're going to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I think we can do better than this. We waited long enough for the oil and gas competitiveness review – the Minister of Energy brought that out into the public light last Thursday in Calgary – and at that there were a couple of pieces missing from it. I'm given to understand that part of the reason that the competitiveness review for oil and gas came out when it did was because there was considerable pressure from the investment community to find out what the government was going to do, which direction it was going to take, that sort of thing.

We certainly have, I think, a good broad sense of the direction that the government is going to take. We're still waiting for the royalty curves to be designed, which I asked the minister about in the House here yesterday, and that will come down, I guess, by or before the end of May. That's a pretty key piece of the competitiveness review, I think, to determine what the royalty curves look like because they could make a lot of difference. So there's still a little bit of work left to do on the oil and gas competitiveness review.

This bill does not get anywhere nearly as specific as the oil and gas competitiveness review did. It just sort of seems to want to somehow increase collaboration between government and the private sector to improve Alberta's competitiveness, to allow for the establishment of a board or a committee with a kind of general loosey-goosey mandate to identify actionable areas for increased competitiveness, to quicken the implementation of government competitiveness initiatives, to establish benchmarks, as I said, to measure Alberta's competitiveness. Yet there is really no detail about how any of this is going to be done.

You know, the government already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat, Mr. Speaker, with the following mandate, and I will quote it in part: "The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta." That speaks to the red-tape burden of compliance requirements and regulations. Although Bill 1 is more about collaboration, I think you'd have to argue that both have similar mandates, and both ultimately have the same end goal of trying to make business more productive, more competitive, make the province more competitive, make our prosperity more sustainable.

If I can talk for a second about the red-tape aspect of things, which is not specifically in this bill but is, as I pointed out, a means to much the same end, we're still waiting for some significant action on that from this government. British Columbia and Newfoundland

have set and even exceeded percentage reduction goals. They've produced results. We've been reviewing the regulatory burden for a decade or more, and we've yet to produce any reductions in red tape that other provinces have. There is a joke, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, governments always support cutting red tape as long as they can cut it lengthwise. It would seem that that's what we've been doing here in the province of Alberta.

In fact, I'm suspicious that someone in the backrooms of the deep recesses of the machinery of government in this province has pulled the wool over the Premier's eyes here with Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, because it doesn't seem to do anything that would enhance competitiveness. It seems to have done something that would enhance bureaucracy through the creation, the implementation, the facilitation of an ability to study the concept of what competitiveness might look like should we wish to actually look at competitiveness. It doesn't really seem to do anything concrete, anything active, anything actionable, anything that solves problems with a goal to making this province more competitive.

You know, that kind of gets under my skin because while we've been looking at competitiveness in the oil and gas industry – and thank goodness for that – I have a lot of people living in my constituency of Calgary-Currie who make their living or try to in the film and television production business, which continues to be one of those businesses, one of those spheres of economic activity, that holds out great potential yet never, ever actually seems to be able to reach that full potential.

There are a couple of good reasons for that, Mr. Speaker. One, the tax incentive, or film development credit regime, that exists in this province relative to other provinces and other jurisdictions where movies and television programs are made. You have to look at two different arms of that, both indigenous, or domestic, film and television production and creating the climate under which Hollywood producers want to come here and film big-budget motion pictures or film network television series for airing in the United States and other countries around the world. We're getting the pants beat off us by other provinces, who, by the way, are going through some of their own struggles, provinces like B.C. and Ontario, cities like Vancouver and Toronto, because they're now competing pretty much one to one with the motion picture industry's own backyard of Hollywood. The dollar is worth virtually a dollar today, and there's a forecast by one of the big banks that, in fact, we will achieve parity within the next couple of months with the U.S. dollar, so that's a challenge in and of itself.

3:00

Of course, there are jurisdictions all over North America, all around the world who want to attract the film and television production business for the very reason that it creates a lot of jobs, it creates a lot of economic spinoff, it's got a multiplier effect, it's clean, and it's green. You know, you don't really have to reclaim a motion picture set to any great extent. You don't really have to go around 40 years later and deal with a television tailings pond because they don't exist. It's an industry that you can bring in and put a lot of people to work in and create a lot of spinoff jobs and a lot of spinoff business for all sorts of other sectors and businesses that will serve the motion picture and television crews and provide services for them. Then, when all is said and done – and you hope that they don't just pack up and go back to California when that particular show, that particular movie, that particular series is done shooting – you don't have a big mess to clean up at the end, which is kind of desirable in this day and age, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that the industry doesn't have yet that it needs in order to really take off in the province of Alberta is a world-class,

right-sized sound stage in the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary is the obvious location for it because most film producers and television producers want to take advantage of the exterior scenery in southern Alberta: the mountains, the prairies, the geography of southern Alberta. In fact, what keeps them from doing a lot more business in this province is, in large part, the fact that they do not have the proper facilities to shoot their interior scenes.

Those are the two things that this industry needs in order to be competitive. There's every indication, Mr. Speaker, that if this government just got down to business on that, we could create a really vibrant, going concern in film and television production in the province of Alberta that helps diversify our economy. It builds on a strength we already have because we're using crews that in many cases are the envy of Canada and the envy of North America. They're highly, highly respected and regarded throughout the motion picture and television industry. We train them here. We educate them here. Increasingly, after we finish training and educating them, we're exporting them to Vancouver, where they can find some work, because they can't find it here.

You see, Mr. Speaker, that's kind of what I think we should be doing here with Bill 1. I'm using film and television production just as an example and, I think, a very achievable example. But we should be getting down to business. I think that part of what competitiveness is all about is getting down to business and solving problems and improving the situation that we find ourselves in and taking real steps to make real progress towards a more competitive and more productive business climate in the province of Alberta, taking real steps towards a more productive and more competitive Alberta.

Instead, what we seem to be taking steps with on Bill 1 is a busier bureaucracy and employment for some more – I don't know – friends of the government or whoever needs a job these days, sitting on a board or a commission or a committee, to sit around and study what competitiveness would look like if we really wanted to be competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we have that much time to waste. We have just come through a very, very serious economic downturn. Luckily, the price of oil, which we have nothing directly to do with – we just benefit from it – is over \$80 a barrel again, and that's going to help pull us out of the recession quicker than some other jurisdictions. But we should be taking advantage of that competitive advantage that we have, by virtue of the fact that we have oil under our foot and it commands a reasonably decent price these days, to get on with the business of getting more competitive not only in oil and gas but in every area that we already have some degree of expertise in. When the world comes out of this recession, all the experts say that it's going to be a very different world and a much more competitive world. We could be part of that, or we could be left behind twiddling our thumbs and studying the thing and debating a bill to allow us to study it and passing legislation to create a committee or a board to do this while the rest of the world is actually making a better mousetrap, maybe filming a half-decent movie about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall under 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. What could the government have done differently in this bill so that we are more competitive?

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



**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, thank you for the question. Well, what could the government have done differently? The government could have sat down, I think, and worked out in Bill 1 some specific steps that it wanted to take to make us more competitive. Depending, I think, on the sector, on the endeavour, on the industry, on business, it could have involved, well, all the things that the board or the committee will eventually chew over over the next year or two or four or 10, as in the case of the Regulatory Review Secretariat: tax incentives, perhaps tax penalties as well for desirable work not done or not done according to a certain set of parameters, real regulatory reform that cuts red tape across itself as opposed to lengthwise, that does like the province of British Columbia has done, for instance. B.C. set a goal in 2001 to reduce government regulation by about one-third in three years. It met this goal and kept going, and as of January of this year B.C. had eliminated 152,000 regulations since the review started. That's a red tape reduction of 42 per cent.

You know, I think you start looking at areas like that, hon. member, and start looking at specifics. Start looking at what can be done and how the government can partner with the industry or the business or the economic sector in question through regular ongoing consultation, where the government sits down at the table representing the public interest and businesses involved in that industry sit down at the table representing the interests of their shareholders and their various stakeholders, and you have everybody committed to a win-win arrangement through consultation, participation, partnership, negotiation. You work it out so that when people get up and leave the table, they leave the table with a solution that everybody can live with, that leaves the people of Alberta better off than they were when we went in. Those would be some of my thoughts and some of my starting areas.

You know, if you're going to go to the trouble of bringing in a piece of legislation, especially given this government, which for years now has said, "The less legislation the better; you really don't need all these laws," then let's bring in a law about something. When I talked about the film and television business, I was reminded that *Seinfeld* used to be a show about nothing, which is fine. I'd support a law that would support the creation and the filming of a show about nothing, but I can't support a law about nothing, and that's what this law is.

3:10

**The Speaker:** That was a pretty long response.

Okay. Any additional comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

**Mr. Kang:** The way the Member for Calgary-Currie came across: is it like putting the cart before the horse? Is that what they're coming across as by bringing in this law?

**Mr. Taylor:** I'm not sure that I'd put it that way, hon. member. I think it's more like: we took the horse out and shot it, and we can't get anywhere with the cart without the horse.

**The Speaker:** Others? The hon. Member for Highwood.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Yes. My question would be: when B.C. got rid of all those regulations, are you inferring that all those regulations were costing someone money? When you're talking about the horse, many of these go back to the horse-and-buggy days. They were just lying on the books and were doing nothing anyway.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a point. If we were to go through all our regulations, whether all our regulations in total or all our regulations in one particular field of endeavour, like the oil

and gas business, we'd find a number of regulations that just no longer apply because people no longer get back and forth by horse and buggy, for instance. We'd find a number of regulations that . . .

**The Speaker:** Alas, the time has expired.

Additional speakers? Additional participants?

Shall I call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

#### Bill 4

#### Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Denis]

**The Speaker:** Additional speakers?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

#### Bill 6

#### Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Denis]

**The Speaker:** Additional speakers?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

#### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

**The Acting Chair:** I call the committee to order.

#### Bill 2

#### Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

**The Acting Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill, if passed, would paraphrase the Health Professions Act by requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible, namely Advanced Education and Technology along with Employment and Immigration, and consider their comments prior to removing or approving a program of study for registration requirements. This omnibus bill would ensure that this provision is included in the Architects Act, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, the Land Surveyors Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, and the Veterinary Profession Act. If passed, Bill 2 would also update the language in both the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, both of which have similar provisions already in place.

Bill 2 also responds to the Alberta government's concern that qualification requirements for an individual to practise in a certain profession are reflective of the actual requirements to do the job.

This proposed legislation would also ensure that the Alberta government is apprised of discussions between professional regulatory organizations and this province's postsecondary learning institutions and is involved at the earliest stage possible regarding any potential changes to postsecondary curriculum.

Finally and most importantly, in addition to providing greater consistency among similar legislation, Bill 2 would continue to enhance the strong, proactive relationship between the Alberta government and this province's professional regulatory organizations. Each organization affected has been advised of Bill 2 and is understanding of the reasons behind these proposals.

Mr. Chair, I would like to address a concern raised by members opposite in second reading. There were a number of questions, but all had a similar theme: why is this necessary at this time, why are we seeing this bill in front of us now, and why duplicate something that's already in place? This government is the first to agree that our working relationships with Alberta's professional regulatory organizations are very strong indeed. Updating legislation and ensuring consistency among several pieces of legislation doesn't have to be a reactive measure. This is about being proactive, about ensuring that government, especially the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, is well aware of any requested changes to curriculum, changes that could affect planning, budgeting, and ultimately the pocketbook of Alberta taxpayers.

In fact, it was the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology who reiterated during second reading that when a change is made to the academic qualification in a profession, we can transmit that through the entire Campus Alberta to ensure transferability for the students and to ensure that there's value there for the taxpayer. So while the opposition is desperately searching for an ulterior motive behind this piece of legislation, I can only say that there is none. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Centre who requested a list of professional associations affected by Bill 2 and began wondering whether it includes doctors, nurses, and midwives, to name a few. The answer is no. Many of the professions she mentioned are already covered under the Health Professions Act; indeed, that is the act that we're intending to mirror in Bill 2.

To be clear, I will now list alphabetically the professions included within Bill 2 for the members opposite: certified general accountants, certified management accountants, certified management consultants, chartered accountants, community planners, human ecologists and home economists, information systems professionals, land surveyors, local government managers, municipal assessors, professional agrologists, professional biologists, professional chemists, professional electrical contractors, professional engineers, professional foresters, professional forest technologists, professional geologists, professional geophysicists, purchasing managers, registered architects and licensed interior designers, school business officials, shorthand reporters, and veterinarians.

3:20

Mr. Chair, also in second reading last week the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised an important question on the use of the term "academic" instead of "education" in the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, one of the acts addressed in Bill 2. We believe, as does the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, that the word "academic" reflects the kind of information required by the government. The postsecondary component is what government is interested in here: degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

There are many other educational activities internal to professions like in-house training or competency requirements; however, these educational activities are not the subject of Bill 2. To make that

perfectly clear, I would like to introduce a House amendment. I propose that section 6(2) of the bill be amended to change the proposed section 15.1 of the Regulated Accounting Profession Act by striking out the word "education" and substituting the word "academic."

I have tabled the appropriate number of copies and will wait a moment while the pages distribute them to all hon. members. Meanwhile, I will add that we've done our homework, Mr. Chair, and we've taken a close look at the legislation involved and look forward to providing greater consistency for all of our professional regulatory organizations.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** As the copies are being distributed around the Assembly, I have an indication from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to be on the speaking list. We'll speak to the amendment first.

We'll call this amendment A1. Any speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the proposed amendment to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act. I will make my remarks brief because I believe that this amendment speaks for itself. It was never the intent for this piece of legislation to capture the internal educational activities of professional regulatory organizations, and under the current use of the word "education," the boundary is unclear. By striking out this word and replacing it with the word "academic," I believe that the intent of the legislation will be more clearly reflected in the wording.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay for responding to the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and ensuring that this legislation is as concise as possible.

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

Any other members on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

**The Acting Chair:** We'll move on to the main bill as amended. You've withdrawn?

**Mr. Anderson:** Yeah.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Any other speakers? The Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. An interesting bill. The objective: it would amend a series of laws governing professional associations in Alberta. The amendments are to require the council of the professional association or its comparable governing body to consult with the minister responsible for the act and the minister of advanced education in the event of any changes to the academic or licensing requirements for that profession.

In the government's summary of the bills for the spring session the purpose of Bill 2 was defined as addressing "the potential for over-qualification which may be unnecessary for an individual to perform the work." That in itself, I think, is a very interesting thought behind this and a rationale.

Bill 2 would affect the occupations that have already been mentioned, but I'll go through some of them: agrolgy, architects, regulated accountants, engineering, geological and geophysical professions as well as land surveyors, regulated forestry professionals, veterinary professionals, and any association registered under the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act.

We on this side of the House will be voting against this, and the rationale behind that is that we feel that it's a redundant piece of legislation that has been poorly justified by the government. Professional associations already consult with the government on a routine basis when they amend or alter their academic standards or licensing requirements.

Some of the professional acts amended by this bill are also unnecessary. Veterinarians, for example, have their requirements spelled out already in legislation. The association representing forestry professionals adjusts its criteria based on a benchmark program at NAIT. Neither association can alter its requirements without going to the minister or to cabinet to change legislation or regulations.

The only objective of the bill is to prevent professional associations from inflating entry requirements, so-called credential creeping. The government has failed to present any evidence of credential creep in many of the occupations affected and noted in this bill. Even if we can substantiate this problem, the proposed bill would not likely resolve the issue as this legislation only requires associations to consult with the relevant ministers and consider their feedback.

I question this part, as I've mentioned before, about the potential for overqualification which may be unnecessary for an individual to perform their work. Now we're calling it credential creep. I have a problem with that kind of thinking because, in my mind, in my opinion, the only way forward both here and abroad will be accomplished with advanced education. The fact that we would even hint at somebody not wanting to further themselves in education, I think, is quite frightening. Why would we always accept the status quo?

I understand, I think, part of, perhaps, being the entry level, but to actually say that it's an overqualification for a person to perform work I find very interesting when, as I've mentioned, in fact the only way forward is through advanced education. We are in competition with India and China; we are in competition with other countries that put high, high emphasis on a highly educated population.

Finally, there's the danger that this legislation is the latest in a series of attempts by the government – labour mobility clauses is another – to interfere with the operations of what is really supposed to be an independent regulatory association. The government has a responsibility to work with professional associations to serve public interests, but it would appear that this government seems to have a very poor understanding of professional associations and the way they approach changes to academic standards for licensing requirements. Every association and every profession that I'm aware of is constantly trying to move the bar forward because many of these associations have research departments. When you do research and put it forward into development, you can't help but move forward.

The stakeholders feel that it is certainly worth having the discussion in the House, and this is what I believe that I have just done. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

3:30

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you. Are there others?

Seeing no others, are you ready for the question on Bill 2?

**Ms Notley:** Excuse me.

**The Acting Chair:** Oh, sorry. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. It's sometimes hard to see those of us way back here by the back door.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak briefly to this bill. This is an interesting bill. There are both good and bad considerations that I think underlie it, and there is some merit to it, yet we also have some concern about why it is coming forward and what the implications of it are. Generally speaking, of course, the bill sort of presumes and those who've spoken in favour of it presume that there has been quite a bit of consultation with the professional groups that are impacted by the bill. We have heard that that level of consultation has not been consistent across the board. One is then concerned what that will mean and the degree to which it actually represents more of a top-down approach to moving forward with this issue, so for obvious reasons we have some hesitation as a result of that.

The other thing, of course, deals with sort of the competing interests. On one hand I think it actually does make good sense for the minister – typically, I assume, the minister of advanced education – to be consulted on these kinds of changes because, of course, in a perfect world it's necessary for the minister to be able to determine whether the system itself has the capacity to adjust to those changes and whether the resources are there and how those might be rolled out and all those kinds of things. Having credentials increase without necessarily having the capacity to provide those credentials to learners would be a problem, and it would ultimately create a shortage. That's important.

The problem, though, of course, then sort of gets into the issue of: what are sort of the overarching objectives on the part of the government with respect to managing the labour force? There are some professions where I suspect, you know, this term credential creep may be a legitimate concern and where, in fact, the professional bodies have almost gotten to the point where we have a situation of the tail wagging the dog vis-à-vis public policy as well as the funding of the professional services provided.

However, there are other professions where that's definitely not the case and where we've actually seen this government articulate a stated desire to reduce the level of qualification in certain professions. That's where I have a bit of concern about what it is that's driving this particular bill. In particular, I refer to, frankly, a majority of the professions that are occupied primarily by women. Whether you're talking about nursing, whether you're talking about LPNs, whether you're talking about social workers, whether you're talking about child care workers, these are all professional groups who at one point or another in the last two years have come up against resistance from this government towards their either promoting the professional qualifications of their group or at least crystalizing and recognizing the professional qualifications of those groups. In every case that is linked, of course, to a desire to keep their wages lower.

Well, we know that in Alberta the wage gap between men and women is the highest in the country – I believe women right now earn about 67 cents on the dollar – and we know that these professional groups and those that have been previously identified by the government in other contexts are primarily occupied by women. One then becomes concerned about what the overarching objectives of the government are and to what extent they're going to try to manage the labour force in a way to save a dollar and the extent to which that dollar is saved on the backs of low- and middle-income professional women.

That is the concern that I have with respect to this bill, and I do appreciate, obviously, that this bill does not necessarily relate to

those areas that I've identified. I also understand that some of the rationale that has been provided to support this bill is a rationale that applied to these other groups and is very problematic. Again, it's one of those things that requires a leap of faith. Simple consultation between the professional groups and the minister of advanced ed makes good sense in terms of planning – it absolutely does – but only if you've got a government that does not gear towards picking and choosing professions based on whatever their economic interest is and whatever the history is with respect to a particular political party's recognition and appreciation for the work that is done.

With those words, I will end my comments on this bill. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you. Are there others?

Seeing none, I'd ask members to return to their chairs before I ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

**The Acting Speaker:** I call on the Member for Little Bow.

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

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you. Having heard the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Little Bow, are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? Carried.

### Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

#### Bill 3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

**Mr. Dallas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest to the debate on Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010. As we've heard, this legislation will amend section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act. Bill 3 awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a surviving spouse; adult interdependent partner, or AIP; parent; or child of a deceased person. The amendment will remove references to marital status currently found in section 8 of the act. This reflects a decision made by the Alberta Court of Appeal and the current state of the law in Alberta.

The amendments will also remove the reference to illegitimacy as the current act defines child to include an illegitimate child. Consistent with current demographics and family law legislation all children are treated as children of their parents regardless of their parents' relationship.

It's now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any speakers? Question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

### 3:40 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

#### Bill 7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Ms Redford]

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, an important bill to be sure, an important amendment that's been a topic of much conversation both in and out of the House, especially since 2008, the last provincial election, when there were so many irregularities, so much uncertainty, so many instances of barriers to access to the polling stations, misinformation, in some cases a sense of a bias in those polling stations with some of the returning officers, and then a lack of accountability around some of these issues. It's no surprise we've now seen a court case launched in respect to this and continued pressure on this government to actually step up and make this a more authentic democratic process.

The essentials of a fair democratic process surely are known to all members. It's no mystery that across the world democracy is being embraced at very different levels of implementation. Surely, the essential measures of a true democracy have to be examined, and they have to do with the freedom to vote unhindered, uninfluenced, and secret. They have to do with fairness to all, regardless of the physical ability. They need to be accessible. They need to be accountable for how they're being influenced by money or by political power. They need to reflect the public will.

On all these counts we have been pressing this government for many years, and it's now reached a point where government has finally taken some action. I commend the government for some of the changes that have been made, but they reflect a less ambitious approach than we had hoped to move the ball forward for a leadership role on democracy in the western world. It took a Supreme Court decision and constant scrutiny of the Legislature to get these reforms made.

I guess the question Albertans are asking is: what is it going to take to get some of the other issues addressed such as fixed election dates; the release of information on campaign financing for leadership challenges; the need to reform our campaign financing, where too much money is influencing the outcome of elections; the lack of enforced access to certain buildings and institutions to campaign; the ambiguity around special ballots to remedy some of the inaccurate or inaccessible situations; the need to address inaccurate polling information and contradictory information that people have received in the past; and, fundamentally, the need to reflect the public will? Again and again Albertans have asked: how is it that just over 50 per cent of people support a particular party and the Legislature reflects that party by 87 or more per cent? Clearly, this is not encouraging people to recognize the importance of being involved, voting, and taking the democratic process seriously.

We've made a number of recommendations in these areas and will continue to do so, having recognized that some of the following are positive changes in this bill amendment. It does, for example, make the Chief Electoral Officer responsible for appointing returning officers. We expect that to result in fewer biased returning officers because the Conservative Party has less opportunity to identify and name returning officers that support their particular political stripe.

It does provide for greater investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer. We hope that will result in more active and accountable results after elections.

It does provide now for anyone who wants to vote early to get access to advance polls. This is positive. People have very busy lives and complicated lives and should not be restricted from early voting if that's their choice.

It does provide that candidates who run a campaign deficit must dispose of that deficit and report to the Chief Electoral Officer when and by which manner that deficit is retired. This is positive. Wherever money is involved, there needs to be transparency and accountability.

It does seek to improve the safeguards of the list of electors, a positive change.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It does allow the Chief Electoral Officer to test new voting technologies and to conduct pilot projects. We need to find better ways, more reliable ways to get people's views and choices into the electoral system.

Several other innovative concepts include looking at election finance reforms. We hope that will result in significant changes to the way campaigns are financed and will properly reflect the priority of Albertans to see that money does not have such an influence on electoral outcome.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would re-emphasize that we on this side feel very strongly about the need to be transparent about leadership campaign financing and are puzzled why this would not be a priority for a government that says that they want to be accountable and transparent. We still look forward to seeing the leadership information from the last Conservative leadership campaigns. That would restore some level of confidence.

We would again encourage the government to look at fixed election dates, which have been embraced by most other jurisdictions, to try to address the question of fairness and to honour our commitment to fair reflection of the public wishes.

With respect to trying to reflect more accurately the public will in the Legislative Assembly and the numbers of members each party has, we would also encourage the government to consider amending this to include a citizens' assembly to examine other forms of voter procedures, including proportional representation and the single transferable vote and other such options that have been explored across the country. There is an appetite in Alberta to look at other ways to improve the accountability of government, the balance in government, the responsiveness of government to the public wishes. By not holding a citizens' assembly, it appears that this government is entrenched in protecting its own interests, its own party interests, and is not interested in advancing an accountable, transparent, fair, and accessible democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you wish to speak?

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak at second reading to Bill 7, the Election Statutes

Amendment Act, 2010. I think it's certainly a very interesting act, and it raises a number of very, very interesting issues that relate to the conduct of elections in this province.

While it's very, very substantive and there's no question there are a number of changes included, it does unfortunately represent what I would suggest is a huge missed opportunity on the part of the government. The amount of work that had to have gone into amending this legislation and rewriting it so significantly probably means that we're not likely to get a similar level of reconsideration of these issues for some time. I think it was an important opportunity for this government to address so many of the democratic deficits that exist in this province.

3:50

Unfortunately, I think that what we have before us, although it's really thick, really represents a huge case of denial on the part of this government in terms of the crisis that we face in this province with respect to the health of our democratic system. I suppose some people might say: "Hey, you know, we continue to get a majority government. That's all that's got to happen, and anything beyond that is not our responsibility." But others might suggest that all political parties have an interest in maintaining the health of the democracy within which they live. Tomayto, tomahto, I suppose, but not quite.

Let me start, first of all, by talking about a couple of the things that are simply not addressed in this piece of legislation at all. I think that it's important to talk about those things. Just because they weren't part of the recommendations put forward by the departing Chief Electoral Officer doesn't mean that they weren't something that required significant consideration by members of this Assembly.

The first issue, of course, simply relates to the issue of spending limits generally in elections. We need look no further than south of the border to see what happens when spending limits are not put into place and what a travesty it makes of the health of the democracy. We know, by looking south of the border, that money is an integral part of the democratic system. One ought not to consider any kind of substantive entry into politics unless one is able to raise millions and millions of dollars, which, of course, means that the vast majority of the country is disqualified from engaging in electoral politics.

We need to be careful that we don't move in that same direction here in Alberta. There's a lot of money in this province, and it's concentrated in certain areas and in certain industries. When it comes to how it is you fight an election on a particular issue, frankly, I think that the people that get to vote should be the people that get — well, I'll talk about donations in a minute. But in terms of spending I think that everybody should have an equal opportunity to make their case and that the people of Alberta, conversely, have a broad range of choices from which to select.

The problem is that when you get into a situation where one group can outspend another group 10 to 1 or, you know, if the problem continues to grow, 15 to 1 or 20 to 1, well, then, once again a serious malaise starts to creep into the democratic system, that we all rely on. We end up in a situation, basically, where people who don't have a lot of money essentially feel like they have no voice. They get frustrated, and they get angry, and they disconnect. When they start to disconnect from their political institutions, they start to disconnect from other things soon after, too, because they just feel as though they have no way of having their opinion heard or reinforced by the community within which they live.

It's really a problem in the long term that we're not looking at spending limits. There are spending limits in other jurisdictions. Obviously, federally there are spending limits. You know, if we can

have spending limits federally, why can we not have spending limits provincially? There's no good reason for it. Other provinces have spending limits. What it does is that it provides for a certain amount of equity.

You still have to be enough of a going concern to raise a reasonable amount of money to be able to communicate with the people whom you want to have elect you, but it's not a question of buying up 30 seconds of ad time for every commercial break on every station for 40 days before an election. If you can start to do that, you're going to let your dollars drive your democracy. That's not what people envisioned when they first put together their democracy, but that's, unfortunately, what's happened. Communication is electronic, and it's expensive, and you either buy the opportunity to give your message or you don't get the opportunity to give your message.

What needs to happen is that there needs to be some equity of access there. As I said, other jurisdictions have considered it. There's been no conversation about that at all in this province, and certainly it's not been included in this legislation. As I say, I believe it represents a huge missed opportunity. Of course, we have a provision in this legislation to refer one particular matter, which, frankly, was a no-brainer, in my view, and should have been included in this legislation, the whole issue of leadership funding. There's already provision for that to be referred to a policy field committee, so why not refer the whole issue of election financing and spending and donation? That is a huge issue that has significant import on the health of our democracy, yet it's not there.

The other thing that, of course, we would have wanted to have seen in this as well is a cap on who can donate. People vote; corporations don't. People vote; unions don't. Again, we have several jurisdictions in the country where the only people allowed to donate to election campaigns are individuals, and this makes sense because they are the ones that get to vote. The same type of limit should be included in this legislation, and it's not. Once again, it's a huge missed opportunity.

I also mentioned, of course, the whole issue briefly about disclosing the funders for leadership contests. In the face of what I've just said, where we have a growing situation where the dollar buys the vote in this province and where we have the Wild West of donation laws right now, one of the few things we have is at least to find out who gave what, yet that's not the case when it comes to the issue of leadership campaigns. That, in my view, is a huge loophole in our legislation, and it's something that I think hurts the interests of the people of Alberta.

As you know, we had a leadership campaign recently for the leader of the third party. Notwithstanding that party's many stated commitments to opening up electoral reform and the whole sort of populist notion that they, theoretically, represent, they soon found the first opportunity to refuse to disclose who it was that was funding the successful candidate's campaign. I think that's something that Albertans have a right to know about. Obviously, the current leader of the governing party also went through that process, as did many members of the current cabinet who also were in a leadership campaign who refused to note who it was that was funding their campaigns.

Again, this is important public policy information. Disclosure is something that can only benefit the health and robust nature of our democratic debate. Again, I see no reason, actually, for hiding that information unless there's something to be embarrassed about. So it's really a tremendous disappointment that that recommendation was not included in this piece of legislation.

There are a number of things, of course, that ought to also have been put into this legislation. One that's close to my heart is the

whole issue around the obligation of the Chief Electoral Officer to provide information about the election process and the right to vote and all that kind of stuff. Unfortunately, we have a Chief Electoral Officer who has been quoted in the media as saying that he doesn't believe it's his obligation to do anything to increase the participation rate of voters in this province, which is absolutely shocking to me. That, to me, would sort of be like the minister of health saying that he doesn't have any obligation to make sure that people can still get heart surgery in the province. It utterly surprised me when I heard that that was the position of this person and that he thought it was appropriate to be considered for the position of Chief Electoral Officer with that position.

4:00

Nonetheless, I think that we have a real problem. We've talked about in this House before that, you know, a 40 per cent turnout for an election is something that is not seen in pretty much any other developed jurisdiction. There are many jurisdictions where people would question the health of the democracy, the human rights of people involved in those jurisdictions, all that kind of stuff, where you would not see a voter turnout as low as 40 per cent. So it is something that we as legislators ought to be ashamed of because it's something that we all need to take very seriously and take some responsibility for.

Since the Chief Electoral Officer reports to this Legislature, I would have wanted to see an Election Act that tells that Chief Electoral Officer that he must focus on the issue of increasing the full democratic participation of Albertans. So that, again, is a huge oversight on the part of this legislation. There are so many smaller pieces that I imagine we'll have a chance to talk about in more detail as we go through this legislation, but I do want to say that those are very, very critical ones for me.

Of course, I have a lot of students who reside in my particular constituency. There were recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer to deal with the confusion around the ability of those people to vote. Basically, we have this ridiculous situation right now that it depends on what time of the year the writ is dropped to determine whether a good portion of the people in my riding are told or not told by the Chief Electoral Officer that they are entitled to vote in my riding. There were several recommendations geared towards addressing the confusion around the right of students in Alberta to cast their ballot, and those recommendations were entirely ignored by this government, as reflected in this piece of legislation.

Again, going back to the previous issue, the fact that we have so very few people voting, study after study shows that if people do not vote in their first election that they're eligible, they are much less likely to vote at all. So here we are again. We're not telling the Chief Electoral Officer to encourage participation, and we're not making any of the changes that were recommended in order to facilitate the full participation of students who are at university or college at the time that the election is called.

Once again, if anything, it appears that the government believes that the best direction is to continue downward, that what we need to do is actually perhaps reduce even further the number of people voting. Personally, I think that if I were over on the other side of the House and analyzing some of the polls that have come out recently, once I got over the fact that I was very likely to lose my position in government, I might want to think about actually increasing the number of people coming out to vote in an effort to save my bacon, as it were. Nonetheless, whether it's self-interest or whether it's for the good of democracy, increasing participation is something that we should all be supporting, and that is not something that is reflected at all in this piece of legislation.

I will say that it is good that the long-standing banana republic-esque practice of having the Premier's office appoint deputy returning officers is finally eliminated. I can't imagine how many decades it's been since it has been eliminated in every other jurisdiction, but thankfully we have at least moved forward on that particular embarrassment.

Again, this is a very big bill, and I would have expected a little bit more than that. So that's where we are at this point on this bill, and I look forward to more opportunity to debate in the future.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. I'd first like to thank this member for bringing forward this beneficial piece of legislation, which serves to reinforce Alberta's democratic principles. Bill 7 amends the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. These pieces of legislation are probably the most important pieces of legislation on the books since they lay down the very foundation for our democratic society.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe in making the system more democratic, and Bill 7 contributes to this. The bill proposes to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers along with changing the way enumerators are appointed, eliminating the need for the involvement of a constituency association or political party. It only makes sense from both a democratic and an administrative point of view to give the Chief Electoral Officer full control of the electoral operation. Additionally, this bill would serve to recognize the broader investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, within the proposed bill advance polls will be open for those who for any reason want to vote early. This will allow anyone who may be working or travelling on election day the opportunity to exercise their democratic right as their personal schedule allows. The opportunity to vote for your choice of candidate is inherent in all democratic societies, and Bill 7 enables all voters a greater ability to do so. My constituents along with all Albertans will find Bill 7 very beneficial.

This bill does not address fixed election dates or allow Albertans to vote at any polling station they choose. I personally would like to see these issues addressed; however, I recognize that at least the first issue has already been addressed in this Assembly. Bill 7 will provide ways for the Chief Electoral Officer to delve into the use of new voting technologies. These technologies could enhance Albertans' options on how they can vote in the future. This is particularly important, Mr. Speaker, in view of the large number of snowbirds who are away for extended periods of time, particularly in the winter months, but still wish to exercise their franchise.

Mr. Speaker, this bill calls for greater accountability in the electoral system. More detailed information will be kept about candidates' revenues and expenditures. Furthermore, the time periods over which records must be kept will be extended to allow for more thorough scrutiny of past election results.

Other amendments in Bill 7 include technical improvements and stricter rules which enable the Chief Electoral Officer to better monitor and enforce financial reporting. These measures greatly increase the transparency in the electoral process. As the Minister of Justice and Attorney General stated, "It is important to balance updated and streamlined processes with maintaining the integrity of the system." This legislation provides all Albertans who vote as well as prospective voters the right to do so in the most accountable, efficient, and transparent system possible.

I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow once again for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I urge all of my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for St. Albert and would like to ask him a question. To my mind, we all have a certain amount of influence in this Legislature as part of our being elected, but I think it goes without saying that the people with the most influence in this Legislature are the people who are leaders. Of course, that would be the leader of the government, the Premier, the leaders of other parties, and all that stuff. I was wondering if he was disappointed that money raised in leadership contests was not made to be mandatorily disclosed in this Election Act like they are in many other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world.

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

**Mr. Allred:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I don't have any strong opinions on that issue. I think it probably needs to be studied a little bit more and some fair rules brought in. I guess I would say that it's not an issue that I feel really strongly about. I don't see any major abuses. I certainly agree with the comments of one of the previous speakers that the system in the United States on leadership and elections in general, where the costs get totally out of control, is certainly not acceptable.

I guess that from my own personal perspective when I ran for city council five times and other previous election endeavours, I've always attempted to maintain a modest election campaign fund, and I think in the end it's paid off. I'm not sure that Albertans or Canadians are particularly impressed with the big-spender concept that is very evident in the United States.

4:10

**The Deputy Speaker:** Section 29(2)(a) still allows for some time. Any other hon. member wish to take that offer?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow on the bill.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to get up and speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I, too, agree that although some changes were made that could be seen to be putting us a little bit in the right direction, when I look at the overall substance of this act, I look at this as an opportunity lost. We could have really done so much more to make democracy a more vibrant and more real thing here in Alberta and to really add to an open and accountable not only government but democratic process that would keep us in line with many other jurisdictions who have moved ahead of us in making democracy available to their citizens as well as sending a message to the electorate that our elected officials will be, like I said earlier, open and accountable, that we will have a system where donations are tracked.

As we all know, money influences the game we all play in this Legislature. We can be naive and bury our heads in the sand and pretend that it doesn't, but let's face it: at the end of the day it does. A little further on in my response here I'll go into some of those instances where we appear to be burying our heads in the sand.

As my cousin David Vamrobaeys from Lethbridge says, this is a bill that has a whole lot of feathers and not a lot of chicken to it. You know, you pass a lot of these smaller, innocuous sort of things, but you avoid the real meat of some of the issues that are brimming here in Alberta, some of the real nice pieces of flank or veal that might be available that the electorate could have really bitten into and really seen the system change here. Let's talk about those.

Right now Canadian soldiers are engaged in efforts across the world not only to uphold democracy, but they put themselves in harm's way to establish democracy, to try and encourage a voting pattern that exists, I guess, in this part of the world, yet we miss an opportunity like this to really strengthen our democracy as much as it could be. It's with that dichotomy in mind that we're willing to send our soldiers on and Alberta citizens take part in that effort to protect democracy. Yet that we here in Alberta through this legislation haven't done all that we can to protect and encourage Alberta citizens to get to the polls is really shocking.

I, too, would like to comment. You know, we have hired an individual here in Alberta who is in charge of elections who has openly stated that it's not his job to encourage Albertans to vote. Like the other member from the fourth party, I am shocked and stunned beyond belief that those words would be uttered and outright actually admitted by a person that has been put into a position such as his by this Legislature. It is beyond the pale that a person would consider taking the job that didn't understand that his mandate would be to try and foster democracy, to try to get people to pay attention to what goes on in this House, to pay attention to what happens in their communities, to go out and cast their ballots once every three, four, or five years when this Legislature goes to the polls. It strikes me as being one of those unbelievable things that, I guess, could only happen here in Alberta. Really, it was just shocking.

Nevertheless, let's look at some more of this bill. Like, I asked the hon. Member for St. Albert if he was concerned that people who run for leaders of their respective parties were not required to put who financed their campaigns out for public view. That to me is one of those things that this bill should have addressed. If we look at the recent leadership run of the governing party, many people took part, and many people funded those campaigns. There was an actual winner, and I would be interested to know who financed that campaign just, you know, because it's important to me. It's important to democracy that not only do things appear to be on the up and up but that they actually are on the up and up.

I think a lot of people in our society, rightly or wrongly, look around and they say: those politicians are bought and paid for. By not stopping things like this, by not demanding that we have this information open and available for the public, we're encouraging the public actually to believe that. We had an opportunity here in this bill to say to Alberta people: "No. Here are the contributors who have contributed to a leadership campaign. You can see by the legislation we've brought in that it was not unduly influenced by these campaign donations, and that's the way we do things. These people supported me for being an open and accountable government, to bring in good legislation on behalf of all Albertans, and you can check my donation list to see that I wasn't unduly influenced."

That doesn't happen here in Alberta. We have remained with our heads buried in the sand, which says: I guess a person who becomes Premier of this great province doesn't have to show who donated to his campaign because we're just going to be naive and assume that money wouldn't influence that person, that there's no way in the world that money would influence that person. You know, I think that's wishful thinking.

We missed a real opportunity to send a message to all Albertans and, in fact, people around the world that we do things differently, that we stand for open and accountable government. That was one thing that really disturbed me about this act, that we could have done this and it would have led to a better democracy.

Let's also look at campaign financing. I would agree that we should have certain limits on the amount of money that various parties can spend in any one election. Now, we look at other jurisdictions around the world, and there are many places, such as Ontario and otherwise, who have brought in those rules, that have limited the number and amount of money individuals and groups can give to any one party or candidate. Those are good. I believe they allow for money to do as little damage as possible, I guess, to the electoral process. We all know we all have to run campaigns. Yet at the same time we know that when those forces like are happening down south – when large amounts are given to those campaigns, it's pretty tough for an individual to, I guess, turn a blind eye to those types of influences. We could have closed some of those loopholes there.

4:20

Let's look at the last two provincial elections. The governing party spent twice as much as all other parties combined. It is probably a little bit of sour grapes, but I think it's also a little bit of the fact that democracy is a little different here in Alberta than it is in other places. It ensured that they had more money for television, telephone polling, brochures, billboards. I even heard that some people were paying for door-knockers to go door to door and having polling done from other areas.

**Mr. Liepert:** Name names.

**Mr. Hehr:** It's word on the street, word on the street.

**Mr. Liepert:** Name names.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, I could name names. The hon. Energy minister wants me to name names, but I won't.

**Mr. Liepert:** Then withdraw.

**Mr. Hehr:** I won't withdraw it either.

Anyway, let's just say that the governing party was spending a lot of money on a lot of different things to get the election results necessary. There we go. I said it and didn't name any names.

Nevertheless, we had an opportunity to do some things better here in Alberta. The names I'll name is that this government didn't do as best they could've to try and stop some of those things that in other jurisdictions in the world we look at and say: that shouldn't happen. Like the hon. member from the fourth party said: banana republics, where, I guess, the political influence on the system of government is not as progressive as it is in some jurisdictions.

Hey, I've been pretty vocal. I would have liked to have seen fixed election dates come into play here. I think it would be a good move, that many jurisdictions have already instituted, that would allow for less gerrymandering with election dates and would allow for, I guess, greater certainty in preparation and allow for our people running elections to do things a little bit better.

If I can comment, I am happy that, you know, no longer will the Premier of this province be selecting the people who are going to be in charge of the polling stations and who are in charge of the electoral districts, those types of things, which should have been changed years ago. I am finally happy that those things have occurred.



Like I said at the beginning, there are a lot of minor things done in this bill that, I guess, eliminated some of the minor troubles that were out there. The government can say: oh, we brought in that electoral amendment, and it straightened everything out, and everything is all in line. It's just that this bill could have been so much more. This bill could have really done a lot more things to have open and accountable elections and encourage Albertans to vote. Needless to say, I'll be putting forward a few amendments in further reading that, hopefully, will maybe bring this bill a little further along, where we should be in Alberta.

Those are my comments at this time, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for questions.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** The hon. member doesn't want to name any names of how campaign contributions could have affected them. He probably talks in here about why people aren't interested in politics. You don't have to name names. Could you just give us an example of when you or anyone has been able to connect a campaign contribution to a benefit that an individual or group got from making that contribution? You don't have any names to name. I'll grant you that. You can fictitiously make that. What do you base your hare-brained suggestions on that this corruption is going on all over Alberta? Can you give us one example of where someone has contributed to any political party – you might have more knowledge in yours; maybe it's over there – that has received a benefit back because of the contribution they made.

**Mr. Hehr:** Common sense leads me to the conclusion that political donations can influence the decisions that are made. Call me crazy, but I stand by that decision. I believe you can bury your head in the sand and ignore the fact that money can influence this process. Feel free to do that, hon. minister. I won't be one of those people who will bury his head in the sand and will deny that money influences this process. I guess that's my answer.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps on another topic, then. Is he one of those who's burying his head in the sand when he totally ignores the fact that all the discussion about leadership rules and processes has been referred to an all-party committee of the House, that all parties can participate in the preparation of appropriate rules and legislation relative to leadership? Is he burying his head in the sand when he totally ignores that?

**Mr. Hehr:** No, I'm not. That was mighty brilliant of the government to do such, but let me tell you something: it would have been just as easy for you guys to legislate it right now.

**Mr. Hancock:** Obviously, you don't want to have any input, and you'd just like us to make the decision.

**Mr. Hehr:** No. Because I could input right now and . . .

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Don't want to be accountable.

**Mr. Hehr:** Oh, yeah. You're right.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, any comments or questions? Standing Order 29(2)(a) still has some time for questions.

**Some Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on the bill?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes. On the bill, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Anything that's this thick deserves a little more chit-chat at second reading than what it has gotten so far, I'm afraid. So it's a little premature to call the question. [interjection] Did I hear something from the minister there? No? Okay. Let me get back to the point because I'm wasting my time, if not yours.

Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, at second reading. I mean, there's a lot that's good in this bill. About the only thing that you might be able to quibble with there is why it took this government so long to bring these amendments in. I think there are a couple of things that are missing, and I don't quite understand why they're missing. One that is key for our side is the fact that fixed election dates are not in here. I don't quite understand why this government seems to want to run from that concept as much as it does. You know, there are fixed election dates in other provinces in this country.

I will acknowledge that one of the traditional benefits in parliamentary democracies of the government getting to choose the timing of the election call within a five-year window is that the government can choose an election date that it estimates, surmises is beneficial to its re-election chances. That puts the opposition, clearly, at somewhat of a disadvantage if the government surmises or guesses right. The history and tradition of parliamentary democracy is such that there are lots of times when governments clearly guess wrong on the timing of those elections, because they go down to defeat.

However, the coming trend, if you will, I guess, seems to be that more and more jurisdictions are looking at fixed election dates, and there seems to be, I think, some real wisdom in doing that. A fixed election date gives everybody, all participants, whether those are members of the Legislative Assembly currently who would seek re-election or people who are considering getting involved in politics – the hon. President of Treasury Board made a comment a couple of minutes ago about the fact that a lot of people don't want to get involved in politics, and there are many reasons for that. One of them is, I think, the uncertainty of this sort of thing.

4:30

It would give everybody a clear understanding of when the next election is going to be, it would give everybody a clear understanding of how long the mandate of current government is, and it would give the government a clear understanding of how long they had until the next election to get their legislative agenda through. I don't know how this is going to go over on that side of the House, but it might actually lead to some planning. You never know.

Having fixed election dates does not necessarily put the government at a strategic disadvantage simply because they have to go to the polls every fourth year on the 32nd of April, or whatever the hypothetical date is. It does give the opportunity to work towards that. I think that, on balance, the positives to fixed election dates outweigh the negatives. It helps to take care of some of the fundraising issues, I think, some of the campaign donation issues, in that it gives everybody a clear indication of how much time they have to try and raise money for the next election.

On the subject of election contributions, I too would like to see some limits of the sort that many, many other political jurisdictions practise that we do not. I mean, Alberta is the only province that doesn't limit spending by political parties or individual candidates, and it has one of the highest, richest maximum ceilings for what an

individual or a corporation or a union or an organization of any kind can actually donate to a political party. It's a rich enough limit: \$15,000 in a nonelection year, and it doubles to \$30,000 in an election year.

Fixed election dates, again, Mr. Speaker, to come back to that, would give everybody the same amount of time to raise whatever kind of money that they wanted to raise for their re-election bid, their first election bid if they were thinking about it. Obviously, different people would have different levels of success or not and different parties would have different levels of success or not at fundraising. That wouldn't change, I don't think. Again, there's no reason, I believe, not to go to fixed election dates.

The other thing that this bill does not do is allow Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division. I find that kind of curious, Mr. Speaker, because one of the things it does do is it opens up the possibility of voting using the Internet, at least on a trial basis if such a measure were to be agreed upon by a committee of the Legislature. Now, Internet voting has some drawbacks. There is always the possibility that somebody could hack into your system on voting day and elect the Rhinoceros Party. You know, it could happen. Well, you'd have to re-create the Rhinoceros Party, but there you go. There is a danger posed by counterfeit websites, viruses, the possibility that a disruption to Internet service could affect the election result.

**Mr. Liepert:** Worse yet, the Liberals.

**Mr. Taylor:** Worse yet, re-elect the PCs. Anyway, we can get into that partisan stuff later, hon. member.

And it's not cheap. In 2006 the Dutch parliamentary election actually experimented with Internet voting, and about 20,000 people took advantage of it to vote on the Internet. The cost worked out to about 90 euros, which would be – what? – about \$120, \$130 Canadian per voter. It's not cheap, but, I mean, things rarely are in their early incarnation, especially when they involve technology. I could certainly imagine that the cost of Internet voting would come down and the safeguards would be built in to the extent that we could in the initial experiment, the initial trial run, and they would get better as time goes on.

You can't help but think that we can't be too, too terribly far away. If we want anybody to vote at all in general elections, we can't be too, too far away from the day when Internet voting is a reality. Well, if Internet voting is a reality, I think pretty much by definition it means that if you are a registered voter and a citizen in the province of Alberta, you can vote on election day from any computer with an Internet hookup. If that's the case, why wouldn't we go to a system that allows Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division?

We are a province of footloose people. We are a province of people who travel a great deal, who move around and travel around within this province for work, for business, for play, for recreation, for a multitude of reasons, and who travel outside this province a great deal as well. Since it strikes me that one of the purposes of Bill 7 is to encourage voter participation – not the only purpose, obviously, but one of the purposes is to encourage voter participation – I'm a little puzzled as to why they wouldn't have gone that route, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I might get an answer. I might get a very reasonable logistical explanation when we get to committee stage on this bill for that issue. I don't know. So I'll put out that challenge right now to see if they can come up with one. But if they can't, then the question remains: well, why not do that?

There are many things that I could talk about that are not in this bill. Certainly, we on this side of the House in the Official Opposition are on record repeatedly as favouring the establishment of a citizens' assembly to look at different ways of electing governments, compare the first past the post system that we use today to differing forms of proportional representation, report back with recommendations, and then put those recommendations out to the people of Alberta in a referendum, as has been done twice in the province of British Columbia.

I would remind the House that the first time it was done with a very high threshold set, it came very close to passing, and the second time that it was put to a referendum, it didn't come within a country mile of passing. The people of British Columbia said: ah, no, we're not interested. So I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, whether the people of Alberta would be interested in going for some form of proportional representation or not, but it seems to me that that might be a worthwhile experiment to go down the road of doing the citizens' assembly.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky is making scary faces right now. Not that he's scaring me with his face, but he's going, "Oh, you don't want to go there, hon. member; that's fraught with danger and problems," and he might be right. He might be right, but I'm just saying that it might be worth considering.

Also, it's worth pointing out that talking about such things as proportional representation is never really in the interest of the party in power because the party in power is doing just fine, thank you. The system works for the party in power. Why change it? The party or parties out of power, when they talk about democratic reform and proportional representation and stuff like that, you know, based on the history of snake oil salespeople in this line of work that we're in who have come down the pike in the last generation talking about the need for democratic reform and as soon as they get within sniffing distance of the trough, they flip-flop and sign up for the government pension plans and all the rest of that – I mean, it does stretch credibility to stand here and talk about the need for democratic reform. Of course, that's what opposition politicians are going to be likely to say because we're not in power, which means that the status quo didn't work as well for us the last time as it worked for you guys on the other side of the House. So it's a bit of a red herring.

Quite frankly, I would love to see a government get into power, or get re-elected for that matter, based on making promises to voters that have to do with the price of eggs and where people live their lives on a daily basis, that, you know, has nothing to do with promising or talking about democratic reform at all, get into power and then, if democracy needs some reformation, just get in there and do it and let the people judge how you did at that.

4:40

Of course, this is an opportunity. This bill is an opportunity to do exactly that. It's an opportunity for the party in power to go down that road of democratic reform should they wish to. Acknowledging that it might be perceived to be in their best interests not to, I'll understand if they don't come back with any amendments along that road, along the road of a citizens' assembly or something like that or something that leads to proportional representation.

I do hope that when we get to committee stage on this we can take a look at fixed election dates and we can take a look at allowing Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division. I think that will take a bill that otherwise, although it may be several years late or several decades late in the case of having the Chief Electoral Officer actually be responsible for appointing the returning officers, nevertheless is a good bill – I think it could make the bill even better.

We shall see what comes down the pipe at committee stage, I guess, Mr. Speaker. With that in mind, I will support this bill in principle, and we will see where it goes from here.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to hear, I think, perhaps some more thought on fixed election dates and the fact that with a fixed election date, although it doesn't particularly work in the United States – it would work better here because I'm thinking of how it's fixed in municipal – you don't have to spend your time campaigning. You know exactly when that election is going to come, so you can work flat out until maybe three months ahead of that election. I wondered if the member might have comments on that.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for that question. She has some experience with fixed election dates as a former city councillor in Lethbridge. Municipal elections, of course, happen as regular as clockwork, every three years in the middle of October. I do note, at least in the city of Calgary, that not much real work seems to happen after about the end of June or maybe the end of Stampede in an election year, but in most election years work gets done up until that point. I think, hon. member, that you're right, that it does shorten down the effective campaign period and lead to more work getting done by the legislators.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I say "the effective campaign period" because, of course, if you want to get technical about this, we have a 28-day campaign period at the provincial level. The writ is dropped, and 28 days later the people go to the polls and decide whether they want to renew our contracts or not for another four years. So, technically, that's the campaign period, 28 days. But I think everybody in this House knows that the campaign period starts much earlier than that when election dates are not fixed and the rumours start to buzz around about, "Oh, it could be this spring; it could be this fall; it could be next spring; we'd best get ready," and all the rest of that.

Part of campaigning is not just physical door-knocking and raising of money and so on and so forth. Part of campaigning is the beginning to angle so that you can get your point of view out to your constituents, take advantage of the fact that, you know, if you're seeking re-election, you already have a bit of a platform, I suppose, to stand on, a bit of a podium to stand behind, whereas your competitors don't. It differs from MLA to MLA, no question about it, but one has to wonder in that last year or so before the election comes along how much work really gets done and how much is just political posturing.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Additional comments? The hon. Member for Highwood.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just got a quick question. I missed most of the speech, and that was very unfortunate, but now we're talking about fixed election dates a little

bit. In one of my fed-prov meetings down east I was visiting with the minister from Ontario at that particular meeting, and we talked about fixed election dates. They have them in Ontario, of course, so I asked her about them. She said: well, when I was in the opposition, that was a wonderful idea, and we did get it. Now, as you know, the Liberals are in power in Ontario, and she made the comment: I don't think that's such a good idea now. I wonder if you have any idea how this Liberal would have that opinion that it's such a bad idea now?

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's because it doesn't really much matter whether you're a Liberal or a Conservative or a New Democrat; when you're sitting on the opposition side of the House, things look one way, and when you're sitting on the government side of the House, things sometimes look differently. But what we really should be talking about here on the question of fixed election dates, hon. member, is not whether it looks favourable from the opposition side of the House or unfavourable once you're in government but how it looks to the people.

The people in Ontario know that every four years or whatever the date is – and I don't know off the top of my head what the fixed election date is for the province of Ontario, but it's about every four years – at a predictable interlude they're going to be going to the polls, and they get to weigh in on the performance of the governing party, whether it's a Liberal Party or a Conservative Party.

**The Speaker:** I'm sorry, but the time has elapsed for this segment. Additional participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill will go some way in addressing the issues, the concerns arising from the 2008 provincial election. The election was nothing but chaos. The writ was dropped, and returning officers were even scrambling to find a place for their offices. The returning officer for Calgary-McCall, because I was in the real estate business, approached me to find a place for her. She ended up finding a house out in the industrial park, and that's where she set it up.

This bill will address some of those issues because returning officers will be in place long before the election, and it will make the Chief Electoral Officer responsible for appointing returning officers. Enumerators will also now be appointed in a manner that will eliminate the need for particular constituency associations or political parties. Enumeration will be done earlier. In the last election 27 per cent of the voters were left off the voting list. When they went to vote at their respective polling stations, they were told that they're not on the list, that they have to go to another polling station; that's where they vote. The voters went from polling station to polling station to polling station. Finally, they got frustrated, and they went home.

That, in turn, caused people to wait long. There were long lineups. I talk about Calgary-McCall from personal experience. There were long lineups, and people were just getting frustrated. The word got out that it takes too long to vote, and voters were discouraged. They said: heck, we're not going to go vote because it takes too long. This bill, I think, will go a long way to addressing those concerns if it's enforced properly.

This will provide greater investigating powers to the Chief Electoral Officer because the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to do things on the spot, I believe.

It will allow anyone who wants to to vote early. We had a concern on special ballots. Only the people who were travelling or people who were sick or couldn't make it on voting day or were

going to be out of the country could vote. At the advance poll we had big lineups, especially in Calgary-McCall. It was done in the basement. The room wasn't big enough, and there were stairs going down to the basement. People were standing for hours and hours in the lineup to vote at the advance poll. This will go to address that concern when people can for any reason vote at the advance poll.

**4:50**

It will bring Alberta in line with the Supreme Court of Canada decision. This means that prisoners have the right to vote.

It seems to strengthen third-party advertising legislation at first glance.

Candidates who run campaign deficits must dispose of the deficit and report to the Chief Electoral Officer when and the manner by which the said deficit is retired. In addition, the time period over which records must be kept has been extended. The legislation will also require more detailed reporting concerning revenues and expenses. I was looking here, Mr. Speaker. What if one cannot eliminate the deficit in the time provided? I don't see any provisions for the candidate. How is he going to handle his or her deficit situation? What will happen in that case? Will there be fines, or they won't be allowed to run again? Will there be some kind of deduction they can make when they file their income tax return? That's the concern I have.

It also seeks to improve safeguards to the list of electors – it changes the kind of information voters can present at polling stations; government-issued ID, for example – and allows the Chief Electoral Officer to test new voting technology and extend the voting hours, maybe, in upcoming by-elections.

Several other innovative concepts regarding electoral reform will be deliberated upon by the Chief Electoral Officer along with the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

Bill 7 doesn't create fixed election dates in the province, nor does it allow Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division.

Leadership campaign financing rules are not included in the bill as the government is expecting to have the matter studied by the policy field committee. I think that they should have been included in this.

The impact. Bill 7 proposes many amendments for streamlining future provincial elections. Of particular note is the extension of the right to vote to correctional inmates as per the decision of the Supreme Court.

The change also opens the possibility of voting using the Internet at least on a trial basis. There are concerns with Internet voting: the possibility that disruption of Internet service could affect the election result; the danger posed by counterfeit websites, viruses, and hacks into the election system. Above all, it's not cheap, Mr. Speaker. In the 2006 Dutch parliamentary election the cost of approximately 20,000 Internet votes was 90 euros per voter. That's about a hundred and forty bucks per vote.

Most importantly and more substantially, the government has been forced to eliminate a previously held regulatory power which allowed the cabinet to appoint the constituency returning officers, a post that was intended for the neutral supervisor of election activities in each constituency. This was an issue during the 2008 election, when it was revealed that many returning officers had PC connections. Many of the enumerators, those responsible for assembling voting lists, also looked like political appointments. This will make it more impartial. The perception out there was that that's what was happening. Real or perceived, this will take that perception away.

Campaign financing remains a concern. Alberta is the only province that doesn't limit spending by political parties or individual

candidates. Ontario, for example, utilizes a formula which limits campaign spending by a political party in each constituency to 70 cents per registered voter. Alberta has no similar provisions to limit spending, so the governing party remains free to raise and spend as much money as they feel is necessary. In the last two provincial elections the Progressive Conservatives spent twice as much as other parties combined. This ensured that they had more than enough money for television advertising, telephone polling, brochures, and billboards while opposition parties struggled to make contact with the electorate.

Nothing was done in the Elections Statutes Amendment Act to limit campaign and political donations. Alberta allows for greater contribution amounts than most provinces. For example, in Alberta the upper limit for a party contribution is \$30,000 during the election year compared with \$15,000 in Ontario.

Finally, other provinces and the federal government have banned donations from corporations and unions. Alberta has no such ban.

However, the most glaring omission is the lack of changes to the leadership finance rules surrounding the leadership contributions to candidates of political parties. The Premier has never fully disclosed all the financial backers who contributed \$160,000 to his run for the PC leadership. Interestingly, the leader of the Wildrose Alliance has refused to name her financial supporters even though it is well known that the petroleum industry has reportedly poured \$250,000 into the Wildrose Alliance leadership. Even other leadership contenders haven't fully disclosed their donors from the last leadership. Instead of instituting full disclosure of leadership donors, the amendment will refer the matter to a committee of the Legislature. I think that that should have been included in this bill to put some teeth in this.

It doesn't talk about proportional representation, or PRep. Critics of the proposed reform have stated that many of the changes do not go far enough, that they are not comprehensive enough in their totality. That said, the act adopts the majority of the 144 changes proposed by the former Chief Electoral Officer from the report that was commissioned as a result of the dismal voter turnout of the last provincial election. Although the reforms aren't an exhaustive response to the previous recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer, they do represent a much more ambitious attempt than most would have predicted.

Well, I think, you know, that by drafting some amendments to this bill for Committee of the Whole, we can improve on this bill. My concern is: is this really the best the Premier could come up with for this legislative session? These are just, like, some housekeeping additions. It only took years of public pressure and a Supreme Court decision and constant scrutiny in the Legislature to get some reforms made. What are Albertans going to have to give up for fixed elections and the ability to cast a ballot anywhere they want?

I think this is a step in the right direction, but I'd like to know more about the 52 recommendations that the government chose not to address. This makes it a little less of an ambitious approach than I would have liked, but it gets the ball moving in the right direction, at least. I believe that with this bill, Mr. Speaker, we will not face all the problems we faced during the last election. This will go to address lots of the issues faced by the electorate, by the returning officers, by the polling clerks, and by the voters. I hope it does what this bill is intended to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**5:00**

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

Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested in Bill 7. In my mind, it is a very small step forward to returning democracy to this province, a very small step. The previous Chief Electoral Officer had recommended 182 recommendations. It's now been watered down to 144 suggestions, which then turned into 92 accepted to be a part of this bill. As I've said, it's a very small step.

One of the reasons that I'm making these comments is because for many years I have had direct experience as a deputy returning officer. I've been in charge of municipal, provincial, and federal elections. I've watched over the years how the integrity of this process has been diminished and manipulated, and it's very disappointing. I was always proud of the integrity that not only myself but everybody that worked on elections displayed.

I'll use an example which can't be used anymore because we don't have the physical manpower to do the enumerations as we used to, and it sort of overlaps what happened in the last election, where the people that worked for the returning officers were all basically okayed by the Premier's office. But in the old days all of the parties presented a list to the returning officer, and we who decided who would be the enumerators, who would be the deputy returning officers, the clerks on the day of the election would choose one from each party, and if there was an enumeration team – and it always was a team – they were never ever from the same party. They also knew that when they became involved in the election process, they therefore did not become political.

I know that the two returning officers that we've had in southern Alberta, both federal and provincial, when they were given these appointments many, many years ago – and they still are there – did not become political. In fact, I'd be surprised if they even had party membership in any party because they took their responsibilities as being nonpolitical extremely seriously.

One of the other things that I'm disappointed to see. Even when I was the returning officer and the deputy returning officer, we did have three parties, and the British parliamentary system really is based on a two-party system, which is why first past the post works very well in a two-party system. But Canada and certainly all the provinces will never ever go back to a two-party system. I believe that without the ability to change the way we vote, we will never truly have a representation sitting in this House of what people really want, and I believe that that's why they're very frustrated and don't bother to vote at all.

I can recall many places that I went, both in this election and the last election, where people were proud that they hadn't voted because it was all such a bunch of malarkey. It wasn't quite the word they used, but I think we all know what they were trying to say. They just had absolutely no interest in voting because they didn't think their vote counted. In fact, in some of the examples that were used to me – and, again, it's a phenomenon in Alberta, and as we all know, Alberta is a phenomenon unto itself – they said: why bother going to the election when the election was won at the nomination? Everybody knew that if they won the nomination, they'd win the election, so why bother voting? In fact, that person could be elected by winning the nomination by a very small portion of the people that were actually allowed to vote.

Actually, Alberta does have an interesting history. In 1921 the Liberal government instituted a block voting system for large cities. MLAs from Calgary and Edmonton were elected. Now, please remember that this was 1921, and the Calgary and Edmonton that we know today certainly did not resemble the cities at that time. They were elected across the city rather than in single-seat ridings. Each city elected five MLAs, and the winners were chosen by polarity; that is, the candidates with the most votes won.

In 1926 the United Farmers of Alberta government maintained at-large voting in Calgary and Edmonton but replaced plurality voting with proportional voting, and the voters ranked the candidates in order of preference. The winners were those with the highest preferences. What B.C.'s citizens' assembly had actually recommended when they went to that vote was the system called the single transferable vote, or the STV. For the rest of the ridings in the province, what we would consider rural at this point in time, a system of majority voting was adopted. A single candidate was elected by preferential ballot, the winner being the one who received 50 per cent plus 1 of the first or subsequent preferences. The system was called the alternative vote, or the AV. This change in the voting system fulfilled a promise by the United Farmers of Alberta made in their successful 1921 campaign.

But in 1959 the Social Credit government abolished the province's mixed system of proportional and majority voting, returning the entire province to the single-member districts with plurality voting. As we know now, it was certainly first past the post. The government of the day changed the voting system without public consultation and was accused of making the change out of self-interest. I can't imagine why anybody would have thought that. As I've mentioned, it's basically that first past the post does work with a two-party system.

One of the things that I've already mentioned is enumeration. As I've mentioned, we don't have the manpower because women are now working and more people are working out of their homes. Also, in those days – and I certainly sound like I'm coming out of ancient history here, but it's not – actually, we didn't have Sunday shopping, and we didn't have as many 24-hour jobs, where the husband babysits, the wife works, and vice versa. It was a totally different society in those days, so it's not really fair to compare what's going on. The enumeration was very important. The people who enumerated also worked that poll, and they knew who should have been on that list and who shouldn't have been on that list and were more than capable of accepting people that could come forward and say: you didn't get me. They knew exactly what was going on in their polls.

But in this day and age all cities, towns, hamlets do census counting in order to receive the provincial dollars based on their population. It's always been a question to me: why are we not using these lists for electoral purposes? They could be turned over to the electoral office, which, in fact, would then be able to adjust those lists to reflect the boundaries in the province. They could use those, and they are updated all the time, so they wouldn't have to rely on old enumeration lists. That was a huge problem in the last election.

We've also talked about fixed election dates. I totally support fixed election dates for a number of reasons. I would suspect that for the feds it should be five years, the province four, and municipal three, which sounds like a lot of elections on top of each other, but it does work at the municipal end.

#### 5:10

The other thing that would work with fixed elections: it would be a much better, more efficient process. The returning officers would know ahead of time when it's going to be. It would help them rent the proper facilities so they're not scrambling at the last minute. They would have lists that were up to date, which, as I've mentioned, didn't happen in the last election. The electoral lists were an absolute mess: a disgrace that a returning officer should have to try to scramble at the last minute to make sure that they're proper so that their deputy returning officers could use them. They would be able to hire the proper help that they need. What those people should know is that once they start working for an election, which is the 28-day period and perhaps a little bit ahead of it, they're not allowed to

be political. The printing that they have to do, the training of the staff: it would be a much more efficient manner to run elections.

I know that we all as politicians have always said that the next election always starts the minute you've been elected and that you're running again for the next time. I suppose that would always be a part of your thinking, but I really believe that fixed election dates would help concentrate the focus on the work that is to be done. I know that it worked well in municipal politics. You'd work, and then it would be maybe the last couple of months ahead of when you knew the election was going to be that it kind of simmered down, and then people would run for election or not.

There was some conversation about the money that can be raised or not raised. Should there be a cap on it? I would like to certainly see a cap on it if for only one reason, that we can give everyone, basically, an equal chance. I think we all know that it's getting more and more expensive to run elections because of the price of television, because of the price of printing. Often the elections turn out to be only for the rich and the connected. I would like to see everyone have a chance, and if they have to raise \$60,000 for a campaign, that's a fair amount of money for the average person on the street. The average person on the street has a great deal to offer to this House in terms of what they would bring to the table and their discussions.

One of the other things that could well happen in the future – and I know that it's been discussed at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities – is the fact that, basically, in Canada we do now have big city states: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, maybe those three. At this point their budgets are actually larger than their provincial budgets, so they really are big city states. I think that's another reason why we should be perhaps looking at how we change the way that we elect people.

We talked about technology to make it easier. I feel strongly that over the last 60, 70 years we've had military personnel that have died so that we are allowed to vote. We should take it as a privilege as a Canadian to be able to vote in a free vote. Yes, as I've said before, people think their votes don't count, but even if they don't count, even if somebody went to a poll and put in an empty ballot, they have fulfilled what I feel to be the duty of a citizen of this country. Why are we going backwards to make it easier for someone to do what we should consider a privilege and a duty?

Technology, I think, can be too easily manipulated. I still can't believe that somebody in a four-year period doesn't have 20 minutes to go to a polling booth. The polling booths are all very easily situated. It doesn't take long. If the process and the efficiency of the system is there, it doesn't take long to cast a ballot. Even if it's half an hour, half an hour out of someone's four-year life is, I think, something that we should consider to be a citizen's duty.

One of the things that has been talked about is everybody being allowed to vote at the advance poll. Again, I think that's something that is going backwards. Yes, make it easier for people to vote in case that they are going to be away. But I think that people who are going to be away for whatever . . .

**The Speaker:** I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has now elapsed.

**Ms Pastoor:** I move to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I've already called it.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Allred:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. You mentioned a couple things I'd

like to just comment on and ask for further elaboration. You indicated you felt that technology or computer voting could be manipulated. I guess my question is: do you have a bank card, and do you use the ATMs? Do you have a fear that that is manipulated?

Secondly, you mentioned the municipal census and tying that in with the provincial enumeration. I certainly had some feelings for that as well. I note that I just got my notice from the city of St. Albert that they're going to be allowing you to do your census by computer this year. That will be good.

I guess the third comment is that I believe there was some discussion a few years ago about tying in the provincial enumeration with the federal enumeration, and that seems to have fallen apart.

Perhaps you'd comment on those three items.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, about my bank card. Do I believe that there's any privacy left in this world? No, I don't. Yes, I use it because I have to. Do I trust it? No, I don't. I think all we have to do is look around at any kind of articles that appear in newspapers on how easy it is for really smart kids to hack in. I think they've even hacked into the Pentagon. So, no, I don't trust it too much.

As far as the federal and provincial enumeration lists being put together, I think that's a good idea, but I still think that I would prefer to use the census lists because they are up to date much better than if we relied on the federal enumeration. I think the last federal election wasn't any great shakes either in terms of enumeration lists that were actually up to date. I think it's already been mentioned how much we move in this province, particularly in the northern areas, where people are working in the oil field but actually, say, may vote in Lethbridge.

I think that this is a problem that should be addressed. Again, it would be addressed perhaps in the same fashion as we would address students who are living in a different riding than where they actually reside. Again, our oil workers are working in a different place than where they actually would reside and be allowed to vote.

I'm not altogether sure that the two enumeration lists would be as successful or perhaps as accurate as if we could use our census lists, that are updated, certainly, on a very regular basis.

Thank you very much for those questions.

**The Speaker:** Additional questions? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just further to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I think I agree with you on the municipal census. It's certainly probably the most accurate method, but it seems like it's always such a waste of money if we do it at three different levels at different times. As I think you indicated, the municipal is usually an annual enumeration. That's likely to be the most up to date. I guess I think that we could really save some money and provide some much more accurate information by doing it once every year at the municipal level. Of course, the province pays for that anyway.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, if you wish.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. I would totally agree with that thought. Rather than using enumerations as we are now, maybe we should be sharing that census information with the feds instead of going back the other way. I really believe, as I think you do, that that is a much more accurate list, that stays up to date, particularly on the rental side of the enumerations because renters often move.

Certainly, for someone who's done enumerations over a number of years, if you go to a house, you think that there's only one, but then all of a sudden you discover there are these three little sort of secret rooms in the basement, and there are all kinds of people living there. Often the people that are living together probably shouldn't be, but that's another whole issue. You do finally get the numbers if you are very, very diligent in what you do, but as I've said, that can't happen. So I'd like to see the census list being shared at the federal level rather than the other way coming around because I just don't feel the federal lists are of huge value, particularly on the rental side.

5:20

**Mr. Kang:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has raised some concerns about electronic voting. What kind of fraud can occur with electronic voting?

**The Speaker:** I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has now elapsed.

I'm prepared to recognize additional speakers.  
Should the question be called?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

**Bill 8**  
**Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010**

[Adjourned debate March 11: Dr. Morton]

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in rising to debate the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010, Bill 8, in second reading. This is a very straightforward bill, and we deal with this virtually every year: housekeeping changes to parallel federal amendments; changes to functional currencies to allow corporations to file their tax returns in the currency they keep their accounting records in, so if they keep their accounting records in U.S. dollars or euros or whatever, they can now file their tax returns in that currency; some changes to fairness provisions, which will allow the minister to waive interest or penalties in certain situations; and really the last change that it makes is a clarification regulation regarding refund interest rates, where they're being reduced by 50 per cent for all prior periods and going forward. This is straightforward. We see no problems with this legislation, and we will be supporting this bill at second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Additional speakers?  
Shall I call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, in light of the progress today and the hour I move that we adjourn to 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]







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