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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
 Third Session

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	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

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

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some distinguished Albertans, distinguished leaders in their communities and in our community, leaders of the Alberta First Nations in our province and the president of the Métis Nation in our province. We have with us today Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead, grand chief for Treaty 7; Grand Chief Eddy Makokis, grand chief for Treaty 6; Grand Chief Allan Adam, grand chief for Treaty 8. As well, we have Rose Laboucan, deputy grand chief with the education portfolio for Treaty 8; Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta; and Gerald Cunningham, president of the Métis Settlements General Council of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, they're with us today because we're having a meeting this afternoon of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Partnership Council, a very, very important partnership council that's come together to provide leadership for education with respect to First Nations and Métis and Inuit students in our province. We will be meeting with them this afternoon. Later on today I'll be tabling two historic documents that pertain to that meeting, and I'll elaborate then.

I would ask these great leaders in our province to stand and receive the warm welcome and thanks from this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program, seated in your gallery: from Priority Printing Limited Mr. Tim

Downey, president; from Access TV Mr. Lloyd Lewis, vice-president and general manager, CTV, and Mr. Eric Rice, production and interactive; from CKUA Radio Network Mr. Ken Regan, general manager, and Mr. Paul Moulton, chair of the foundation, and Ms Katrina Regan-Ingram, director of marketing and sales; from the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mr. Jack Clements; finally, Mr. Ron LaFranchise, volunteer. The School at the Legislature program gives grade 6 teachers from all over our province an opportunity to relocate their classrooms to the Alberta Legislature for a week. I would ask all our guests now to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you today to the members of the Assembly 26 grade 6 students from Trinity Christian school in my constituency. They're accompanied by their teacher, Miss Cheryl Barnard, and 10 parent helpers. They got in their vehicles today and came up those icy roads, and they're here to see what we do. I'd ask if they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a special group from Boyle school in my constituency. When I first saw this group a few weeks ago in their class, a young Peter Mischuk asked me the question: what's it like to be in the same room as the Mace? It certainly is an honour and a privilege to be in the same room as the Mace and represent my constituents and my students, and I'd like to thank Peter for reinforcing that to me. Peter is joined by 23 other students and six leaders: Darrell Bergmann, Emily Thomson, Stacey Welsh, Jeff Scammell, Barb Sullivan, and Nancy Amero. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions with your indulgence. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Roger and Jann Beer and their daughter, Victoria. The Beer family own a small farm near Rivière Qui Barre in the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency. Jann and Roger have educated their two children at home. They enjoy their horses and other pets and are actively involved in the Morinville Alliance Church, which my wife and I also attend. Victoria would like to someday compete in the equine competition at Spruce Meadows, and I think that with this young lady's determination she will do that. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise now and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is one that, in my nine years of being in the Assembly, I believe is the first time I've had the opportunity to do this; that is, the Beer family is accompanied by my partner of many, many years and my partner for many, many years to come. In fact, we're celebrating our 30th year this year.

Mr. Snelgrove: She was five.

Mr. Horner: She was five, yes.

She's also going to be a grandmother in May this year, which I think is fabulous. Of course, it means that I'll be living with a

grandmother, but that's okay. Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to introduce my wife, Rose, who is also in the members' gallery. I'd ask her to please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two Edmonton public school board school trustees, Catherine Ripley and George Rice.

They're both on a new standing committee of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta called the Intragovernmental Political Relations Committee. It's a committee rooted in the strong belief that respectful working relationships between provincial elected officials and local school board trustees will lead to enhancing public education in our local communities. I'm certain that all MLAs will be hearing from the committee and from these two trustees, and I'm sure that they will welcome input from MLAs with respect to that relationship.

I can tell you that after 30 years of knowing Trustee George Rice – he was actually my wife's first school principal when she joined Edmonton public – and a somewhat lesser time Trustee Catherine Ripley, who was the chairman of the Whitemud Coalition of Schools some years back, they have excellent working relationships and excellent ability to promote public education. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a distinct honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and to all members a truly inspirational Albertan. Walter Twiddy is an impressive leader and champion in collaborative efforts to end homelessness in this province. He's the CEO of NeighbourLink and with his staff and associates works miracles for Calgarians and Albertans every day. If Oprah Winfrey got a hold of him, she'd follow him around for weeks, doing a great series on what he does at home and at work. He's a tireless community volunteer, very dedicated to the Calgary-Lougheed PC Association and policy, good policy, across this fine province. If I were to give you his resumé, it would take the rest of question period. I won't do that, but I will say that I would be remiss if I did not admit that he is a real inspiration in the fact that he's an exemplary family man, who hopes to enter law school soon so he can become even more of an advocate for those living in poverty. Most of all, for me he's a very treasured friend. Mr. Walter Twiddy is in the members' gallery. I hope that you will now stand and accept the warm welcome of your Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests in the members' gallery today. I'm thankful that these visitors have taken time out of their busy schedules to come and watch question period. They are all involved in fundraising for the relief efforts in Haiti, and I will talk about that in Members' Statements. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Reshamdeep Mundy, Mr. Savi Kachroo, Mr. Inderjit Gill Mullanpur, Mr. Harpreet Sandhu, Mr. Harjinder Singh Ahluwalia, Mr. Navjot Channe, Mr. Gurfateh Brar. I would like to ask these gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly participants and friends from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary's leadership engagement action and development project, the LEAD initiative. The key goals of this initiative include to engage committee members and groups to take active roles in addressing the issues that affect them and their communities; to work with mainstream organizations and promote awareness, respect, and participation of culturally diverse groups in these organizations; and to engage visible minority community members in critical understanding, analysis of public policies, and to facilitate their participation in dialogues.

These members are here to observe the Legislature in action and support Motion 505 this afternoon. I would ask our guests to stand as I call your names: Marichu Antonio, director, Babae Council of Filipino-Canadian Women and executive director of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary; Fromencio Bensing and Sheeba Vijayan, co-ordinators of the council; Junior Coco Kalombo, president of the Calgary French youth society; Artan Ravmanoski and Bukurie Mino, board members of the Albanian community association of Calgary; Jean-Claude Jassak and Pierre Hournou, directors of the Afro-Francophone Alberta Rehabilitation-Integration and Care Services; Lily Kwok, executive director of the Calgary Chinese Community Services Association; Richard Lee, director of the oriental music and arts school and Chinese Community Services; Irene Yi, member of the Calgary Chinese Cultural Society; Rahmat Sai, president of the Calgary Afghan community Hambastagi Cultural Association; Quang Trinh, Calgary Vietnamese Youth Group; Jason Klinck and other members from the Centre for Newcomers. I would like to ask the members in this House to extend to them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce the second half of the team from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary's project LEAD initiative. I'd ask my friends to rise as I call their names: Bishnu Subba from the Nepalese Community Society of Calgary and Bharat Regmi from the same organization; Funmilayo Aregbesola from the Nigerian community as well as Bukola Okedara from the same community; Maria Mora from the Peruvian association; Evelyne Kemajou from Portail de l'Immigrant en Alberta; Paul Mayen from the United Sudanese-Canadian Enhancement Society as well as Mario Ayudo from the same organization; and my friend, Fowzia Isse, from the Somali community. I'd ask all members to give these individuals the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished young lady, Her Worship Olivia Hoepfner, mayor of Rideau Park school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, where she is also a grade 6 student. Olivia was elected on November 13, 2009, and like all members of this House, Olivia conducted a campaign. Her proposals included asking students to bring a toonie for the Hogar Llanero Brisas del Canada in Colombia, a home away from home where students from the distant plains live while attending school, and the proclamation of two pajama days per year.

In addition to these campaign promises, Olivia also helped organize an Olympic day to support our great Canadian and Albertan athletes and a bake sale where all proceeds were donated to the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Olivia is accompanied today by her parents, Geoff and Tricia Hoepfner, and I would ask all of them to kindly rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Mr. Ron Lau and Mrs. Suzanne Clemens. Both are seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Lau is a member of the Canadian Red Cross Central and Northern Alberta Regional Council, and Mrs. Clemens is the operations manager of the Canadian Red Cross, central and northern Alberta. Both are present today to hear a member's statement I will be presenting regarding the contributions of Albertans through the Canadian Red Cross in Haiti relief. I would ask that both Mr. Lau and Mrs. Clemens rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three special guests who have come here today to show their concern with some of the policies of the special needs assistance for seniors program, which I will ask a question about later. I would like to ask our guests Carol Kotyk, her son Rick Breum, and her grandson Connor Breum to please rise and accept our warm welcome.

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 all members of the Legislative Assembly representatives of the Centre for Race and Culture, Siye Abbenstets and Trevor Gladue. Since 1993 the Centre for Race and Culture, formerly known as the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, has worked to foster social harmony and cultural inclusion. The centre organized the 17th International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Edmonton. The campaign includes a variety of events throughout the month of March to bring public awareness to the fight against racism. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature my guests Logan McIntosh and Keely Kidner from the University of Alberta water week working group. The United Nations has designated March 22 as World Water Day. The water week working group is a coalition of various University of Alberta environmental and social justice groups who are striving to highlight local and international water issues this week. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Cancer Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most heart-wrenching moments a person can face in life is when they're told:

you have cancer. They turn to the health care system and count on a co-ordinated, timely, high-quality response. For reasons unknown this government has disbanded the Alberta Cancer Board, which ran Alberta's cancer treatment and research system, including the Cross and Tom Baker cancer centres. To the Premier: given that every other province has an equivalent to the Cancer Board, will the Premier order the Alberta Cancer Board restored in Alberta?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: No, Mr. Speaker. A decision has been made. The Cancer Board is incorporated under the Alberta Health Services Board, and it'll stay that way.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that cancer treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach with pathologists, physicians, surgeons, nurses, why is the Premier standing by while these teams are being dismantled?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the opposite is true. We have under the Alberta Health Services Board a good model where all services are put together under one board, and it's a true reflection of all of our medical providers working together, including all of the cancer specialists and all of the various specific programs that are offered. In fact, because of those individuals we are now doing more cancer therapy in outlying rural hospitals, and that will continue in the province.

Dr. Swann: Well, in fact, the opposite is true, Mr. Speaker. There's chaos in the system, with longer wait times, frustration at both the patient and professional ends. Why have these multidisciplinary teams, then, that work together on cancer been effectively separated and instead of one direction now have seven different directions to report to? How is that more efficient and effective?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, they report to one board. I believe the hon. member is talking about some of the articles in the paper this weekend, where we had some of the specialty individuals speaking, that it would be nice to have a two-week waiting period. The cancer representative responded that that would be great, but the current waiting times for cancer are at about middle of the road for the country of Canada. Can we improve them? Yes, we can, and we will. The minister will be making announcements soon.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A high-intensity residential fire report sat for seven months until this government responded to the recommendations. It took another year for them to update fire safety regulations. Last week we saw what happens when government fails to act in a timely way: 300 Calgary residents are homeless due to a massive fire. To the Premier. Requiring sprinklers on balconies and in attics of low-rise buildings should have been an easy task for government. Why did it take this government over 18 months to enact these fire safety recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our sympathies to all of the families. Thankfully, no lives were lost in the condo fire in Calgary.

I can tell you that we had and continue to have very high standards with respect to the codes, and we will continue to improve the codes. The codes that were in place were already above most of the national standards that were implemented, so we were ahead of other

provinces. We will continue, once the review and investigation into this fire is done, to see how it started and what else we can do in the future.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: how many Albertans are living in potential fire traps that were built during the year and a half that this government sat on these recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: None. I think that's quite an irresponsible question.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, 300 people are homeless because this government couldn't make changes to safety codes soon enough. What will the Premier do to help the thousands of Albertans that are in buildings now that were built before fire safety was finally strengthened? What will you do now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, building codes are very complex. They require, of course, due process on such matters as technical research, all of the matters relating to building and fire science, and also stakeholder consultation and public consultation. We have done a lot of that in terms of introducing the most recent codes. The other thing is, though, that we don't know how the fire started, what led to this. Let's wait for the full report to make sure that we know what issue we're dealing with, and once that report is in, then we'll be able to take that under consideration.

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

Water Management and Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is World Water Week. When we look at the state of water in Alberta, we see that the communities in southern Alberta have run out of water allocations, the South Saskatchewan River basin has been rated the most threatened river in Canada, and 2010 is projected to be another year of drought, the seventh in the last decade. To the Minister of Environment: why does the minister choose to respect an antediluvian industry-centric system at the expense of the inclusion of new or growing regions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understand the reference that the member makes, but the fact of the matter is that in the preamble the member stated various obvious issues. We are entering a drought. It wasn't my cause. We do have pressure on the South Saskatchewan. It wasn't a result of the government. What is the government doing? We are taking very seriously our responsibility to ensure that we protect the water in the best available way and that we allocate that water to all necessary users.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that more water will be pulled out of the rivers if the FITFIR, first in time, first in right, owners are allowed to sell their allocations, why is the minister moving toward a water market which further entrenches this system?

Mr. Renner: Well, I shouldn't have to remind this member because I think she, above all, should know that there is only so much water in the river, so to suggest that more water can be withdrawn is an inaccurate statement. What we're talking about is sharing in the most equitable way the water that's available while, at the same time

— and I must emphasize this, Mr. Speaker — assuring that the number one priority is the protection of the healthy aquatic ecosystem, and that is a nature conservation set aside.

Ms Blakeman: No, not true.

Back to the same minister: why is the minister playing both sides against the middle with his insistence on keeping the centuries-old I-got-here-first entitlement and pitting it against the threatened water system of the South Saskatchewan and other water basins?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's kind of what politics is all about, isn't it? It's about recognizing and respecting history and putting plans and necessary policies in place to ensure our future. That's exactly what my job is about. That's what I do every day. I balance historical record and future needs.

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

Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government talks about openness and transparency, but when health care professionals bring forward their concerns or problems, they are referred to the Alberta Health Services code of conduct, which is commonly known as the code. The code is at the heart of AHS bylaws, procedures, standards, guidelines, regulations, policies, and directives on how employers are to conduct themselves. My question is to the minister of health. What exactly can health care professionals talk about with regard to improving our health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the new and improved code of conduct that was brought in in December, pretty much anything and everything that deals with health care from a patient's point of view and from a medical needs point of view. Policy matters: they might want to ask me about, or they might want to ask somebody in Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that AHS provides health service delivery in response to direction received from the minister, will the minister of health send a memo to all health care professionals indicating that they can speak out with their concerns to their MLA, media, and Albertans without fear of being reprimanded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, there is a new code of conduct that the nurses have agreed to. They're fine with it. I've talked with the doctors as well. They are fine with this. They can feel free to talk about any medical issues they want and with whomever they want whenever they want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right. Then I'll look forward to that memo going to the health care professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since part of the AHS code tells employees to be open, honest, and transparent, if a health employee believes a policy is harmful to patients, who are they accountable to: Alberta Health Services or the patients in their care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the health professionals in this first-class system do an awesome job day in, day out under very trying circumstances. They should be saluted. If they have an issue with

regard to policy, there's a protocol to be followed just like there is with any employer, and that's very clearly laid out in some of the organizational frameworks. They can talk to Alberta Health Services, or they can certainly write to me if they wish.

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

Cancer Services

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The time between being diagnosed with cancer and beginning treatment is torturous for Alberta families. The government's goal is for wait times for radiation therapy to be no longer than four weeks. Last summer more than 40 per cent of Albertans had to wait longer than that. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier tell the Assembly what the government is planning to do to rectify this situation?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the previous question on the same topic I said that the minister is putting together not only a capital plan, but now that Alberta Health Services has a five-year increased funding commitment, they're able to plan better, look at the changing demographics of the province, and also will have good input in terms of the capital requirements over the next number of years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Alberta Health and Wellness projections show that approximately 50 per cent of Albertans will get cancer and that half of them will die from it and given that our aging population finds the Cross Cancer Institute with an increase of 4 per cent in its intake each year, why won't the Premier admit that his current strategy is inadequate and cannot keep up with the rapid growth of cancer rates in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister can supplement in terms of his plan.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're putting in place some very effective strategies called performance measures and targets to hold the system itself accountable, we've added to that significant dollars in this five-year funding plan, that's going to be rolled out very soon, and we are meeting with doctors, oncologists specifically, to ensure that we're going to get that all corrected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Setting targets just won't do it. Given that the government previously promised a billion dollars for cancer hospitals nearly five years ago and failed to meet that commitment and given that this government is failing to meet its own targets for oncology care, will this Premier commit to develop a new cancer strategy that includes new capital for cancer hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton and the resources to staff them, making it possible to meet the four-week target for all Albertans who have cancer?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. I've said it so many times that I have it memorized. We're coming out with a capital plan on or about March 31. That will have a good snapshot into what we're doing with health facilities, including cancer facilities

and others that are able to be accommodated in the three-year capital health facilities funding plan.

We are also bringing in the radiation therapy corridor. There's a new facility for radiation therapy that'll be opening in Lethbridge, for example, in June. There's one that's going to be coming to Grande Prairie. There's one that's coming to Red Deer.

We're doing a lot to address cancer issues. I agree that there's a lot to be done as well.

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

Special-needs Assistance for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A man was prescribed meal supplements when he was being treated for cancer, and his family was told that the cost would be covered through the special-needs assistance for seniors program. With this information the wife bought the meal supplements. Unfortunately, the gentleman has died, and his widow submitted the claim for reimbursement. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is the benefit for special-needs assistance not reimbursed to the survivor when the claimant has passed away?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to express my sympathy for this loss to Ms Kotyk and her family. While I can't comment on the specific client situation, I can tell you that the special-needs assistance program assists low-income seniors with one-time or extraordinary costs such as some medical expenses, appliances, and essential minor home repairs. A special need is a one-time or extraordinary personal expenditure that is required to meet the needs of low-income seniors.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: why is this department's policy not to make any further contact with the family of the deceased, leaving the family in limbo at a very difficult time?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once again, I can't comment on a specific case. But once a senior passes away, they can no longer directly benefit from the funding as the special-needs assistance program cannot provide funds directly to the estate. Also, if the spouse of a senior who has passed away is not a senior themselves, they are not eligible for funding from the special-needs program.

Ms Pastoor: They had been told that she would receive it, which is why she spent the money.

Will the minister immediately extend this benefit to claimant survivors and order the department to maintain contact with the family until the claim is discharged?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I will look into this policy, and I will review what has been said.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

(continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a devastating fire tore through a condo complex in Millrise, which I've visited a number of times since, in my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. The fire virtually destroyed the building and left hundreds of people looking for somewhere else to live. The residents are left with many

questions, including about code changes requiring sprinklers on balconies and in attics. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Apart from what we have already heard, can the minister give us some more details on the impact the new code may have had on this fire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sympathies also go out to those affected by the fire. The investigation is under way, and we are trying to figure out how that fire may have spread. Alberta updated its building code and the fire codes last year, ahead of any other Canadian jurisdiction. These codes are meant for people to buy time to get out safely and for the firefighters to fight the fire as quickly as possible. We had very, very high standards before, and now we even have better ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. What is the government of Alberta doing to assist the victims of this Millrise fire in any specific and tangible ways?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we remain in contact with those that have been affected by the fire. The Alberta fire commissioner has also been in contact with the city of Calgary and offered assistance, but no assistance, apparently, is required at this particular time. There's been an outpouring of financial donations, which are also helping provide for clothing and household items and other items that may be required.

Mr. Rodney: My final supplemental is for the Minister of Service Alberta. Why is insurance mandatory for vehicles and not for residences?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Condominium Property Act condominium corporations are required to carry insurance for the overall condominium building, and that will vary from building to building and mainly for specific things, including fire. The insurance for residential units will vary, and oftentimes individuals should as well carry contents insurance with the backup of what the condominium does provide.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Minister of Education has catered to the competitive ideology of the Fraser Institute by releasing standardized test scores from across the province, which have a more punitive than celebratory effect. To the minister: what motivational value or educational relevance does publicizing test results given at the end of the previous year for students who have left their division have for either students, teachers, or parents?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, far from cratering to whatever it was the hon. member suggested, the Fraser Institute accesses the information that they publish through the freedom of information and protection of privacy rules in this province. Information that's

in the hands of government that is not otherwise protected is available for release to people who apply appropriately under the act. I have no ability to withhold that information even though I disagree with the way that they use it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What purpose is achieved by permitting the publishing of rank-ordered school test results, particularly for those scoring below the 50th percentile? Does the minister believe that either embarrassment or degradation is a motivator for future success?

Mr. Hancock: I don't think the Fraser Institute report, Mr. Speaker, has any value whatsoever, and I say so every time I'm asked. I think it's a totally inappropriate use of the data, and I wish people wouldn't read it. But I cannot stop them from publishing it, I cannot stop newspapers from publishing it, and I cannot stop people from reading it.

Mr. Chase: Would the investment in time, effort, and money that goes into the preparation, marking, and evaluation of these one-shot wonder tests not be better spent at the classroom level in addressing both students' confidence and competence?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that our school boards across the province are addressing the issue of students' competence and confidence in their classrooms on an everyday basis and that our teachers are doing that as well. There is very much an appropriate process for assessment of and for learning in the classroom, but there's also an appropriate way – and whether or not the provincial achievement tests are that appropriate way has been the subject of discussion for a number of years and will go on – to be accountable to the public for the \$6.3 billion that are spent on public education in this province every year and make sure that the system is working.

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

Gang-related Crime

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent came to see me last week expressing deep concern for the safety of her family, especially her two young children. This is because her house is located next to a house that was targeted for two gang-related drive-by shootings within a year's time. Her two young children's bedroom is right next to the house that was involved with the shootings. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. My constituent wants to know: what is your ministry doing to provide the needed protection to her family and neighbours?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gang crime is serious and unacceptable to us all, and we're taking actions in our communities to help Albertans feel safe. We've instituted, as you may know, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, developed to combat serious and organized crime, including gangs. They've taken some 2,500 individuals, charged them. They've taken 800 kilograms of drugs, 350 firearms off the street. We operate a SCAN unit underneath the ALERT team, that Albertans can talk directly to. Just visit the website.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister: what programs and initiatives are there to provide information and support to the family members of the gang members?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we have the ALERT and the SCAN resources out there. Constituents are invited at any time to talk to the police. At all times any communications with law enforcement are confidential. I might add that we added the witness security protection program, which will provide short-term protection during the execution of a trial. This could be of assistance to the families. I would also add that the ALERT ITRAC unit can be employed when family violence is an issue in gang membership.

Ms Woo-Paw: My final question is for the Minister of Justice. How is the safe communities initiative addressing the recruitment of vulnerable youth into gangs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the safe communities philosophy and this government need to deal with education, awareness well before we look to prevention and prosecution. What we have done is developed a comprehensive gang reduction strategy that identifies the fact that we very often have youth at risk very early in their life. We have a number of partnerships with social workers, police, and principals, the youth at risk development project in Calgary. We also have a number of SCIF initiatives that are dealing with youth in communities around the province to identify the particular risks in communities that will avoid decisions with respect to gangs.

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

Checkstop Program

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Random roadside sobriety testing in Australia and New Zealand has been very successful in curbing drinking and driving and likely would be in Alberta if it was employed on a more frequent basis. To the Solicitor General. Right now in Calgary it only has one unit to handle its checkstop program. How do you think a municipal police force can hope to make any impact without the proper resources to test more motorists?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know or should know that the Calgary Police Service provides municipal policing, not the department. We work with the department. He will also know that one of the reasons we announced our integrated traffic model to be deployed across Alberta is that it will give us 19 locations across the province, a critical mass sufficient to man checkstop or vehicle safety checks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone agrees that a visible presence for Alberta's roadside checkstops is a surefire way to improve traffic safety, but current strategies are infrequent and episodic. Will the Solicitor General take a strong stance and commit to long-term projects to eradicate drunk driving in addition to regular increases on holidays and other festive occasions?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I think we did commit and we are committing,

Mr. Speaker. As I said, we've deployed units across the province. We are absolutely going to be able to increase checkstops, holiday checks, all of those things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to ask my third question. An increase in checkstops means a corresponding decrease in fatal accidents. When will this ministry and this province provide police with adequate funding to deploy checkstop units on a regular basis throughout the province?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'm dead convinced that I answered that question twice now, Mr. Speaker. We just announced the deployment of 19 integrated sheriff-RCMP stations across the province, which will provide us with a critical mass to be able to do checkstops, vehicle safety checks, those sorts of things. We will be enforcing impaired driving.

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

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many postsecondary students across Alberta are concerned about their current financial situation and accumulating debt. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Given the current economic recession, job prospects are uncertain. Many graduates are having to continue their studies. What assistance can new graduates get to pay their student debts and tuition fees if they extend their studies?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working with the students over the last six years, the last three on the affordability framework. As resources have allowed us, we've been ticking off the things around affordability that are important to the students. Obviously, in Budget 2010 we made some improvements to the programs, including higher lifetime loan limits and a new, more flexible repayment assistance program. Really, in answer to the hon. member's question, the new, flexible repayment program is going to be very valuable to our students in the coming years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: what efforts are being made to regulate mandatory noninstructional fees at Alberta postsecondary educational institutions?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have had this question in the House a few times now as it relates to ancillary fees. Most of these fees that we're hearing about are just proposals at this stage. We are keeping a close eye on that situation. We do want to ensure that any fees that are of an instructional nature are certainly kept within the tuition fee policy. If there is a need – and I've said this to the students – to regulate noninstructional fees, we've actually asked the students to work with us and the postsecondaries to draft a possible regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: how do the current loan relief program and the new repayment assistance program meet the needs of students with a large student debt?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the focus is on providing all of the eligible students with the assistance that they need to help meet their costs, and that includes the cost of tuition, the cost of living, the cost of books, all of those things. We ensure that the debt above a set of thresholds is actually forgiven for qualifying grads to help ensure that the students have a manageable debt load at the end of their studies. The repayment assistance plan is going to provide even more flexibility to grads struggling to make loan payments as they enter the workforce, and we'll continue to monitor that affordability framework.

High-intensity Residential Fires

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week 400 Calgaryans were left homeless by a disastrous condo fire. It appears the fire began on a balcony and spread to the complex's attic. Thankfully, no one was killed, but residents are asking why this government delayed implementing a 2007 report calling for mandatory sprinklers on balconies and in attics. The Millrise condo complex was built in 2008 and did not include such sprinklers. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did it take from October 2007 to May 2009, 18 months, to implement these recommended building code reforms?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think Alberta should be commended, not criticized, for being proactive and taking action to protect Albertans. Building codes are very complex and require due process. We have to do the technical research on building and fire science and the stakeholder consultation. That always takes quite a lot of time, and a lot of public consultation is required before those are accepted.

Mr. Anderson: To the same minister: given that it only took this government one month – one month – to accept the recommendations of the 2007 royalty review panel overhauling the regulatory regime of our most important and complex industry, why then did it take seven times longer to accept the few but important recommendations regarding balcony and attic sprinklers in the 2007 fire prevention report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta already has one of the strictest fire codes in the country. There is no doubt that updating our building codes took some time, but we're over two years ahead of any other jurisdiction across Canada. There is no doubt that it took some time, but we wanted to make sure that we were getting it right.

Mr. Anderson: The minister should have acted faster, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: was there any lobbying on government that caused the one and a half year delay in implementing these fire safety building code recommendations, and if so, by whom?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that there was any lobbying, at least not to me.

Mr. Speaker, it's very misleading to say that 300 people are

homeless due to building and fire codes. Building and fire codes are meant to help slow the spread of fires and protect the individuals. We need to look at what caused the fires in the first place and how those fires spread, and these are the things that we're looking at.

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

2:20

Building Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government had an opportunity to introduce new standards for home and condo construction, but instead they chose to do nothing. Now housing starts in Edmonton and Calgary are triple what they were at this time last year, and Albertans have no new protections against shoddy building practices. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why is this government leaving thousands of new home and condo owners at risk of the same kinds of shoddy construction practices that hurt Albertans during the last housing boom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As previously said by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, building codes are in that area. But I can address the issue of the Condominium Property Act, some of those areas that we will be doing consultations on in the spring of 2011. What's really important here is that there are issues across different ministries, and we need to make sure that we look at all the issues and come to a good decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More consultation, more consultation, but there's no action. Why is the minister not moving now to protect new home and condo buyers by speeding up her reviews of the fair trading and condo property acts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fair Trading Act and the Condominium Property Act are both very cornerstone pieces of legislation for this government. Under the Fair Trading Act there are a number of areas where we've been able to go after individuals and charge individuals. The Condominium Property Act has a working committee that is working very hard right now with a number of stakeholders to move forward when we do the consultation in the spring of 2011.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why isn't the minister releasing the results of the study of residential construction practices that his department did two years ago?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we consulted with stakeholders such as builders, municipalities, fire chiefs, building and fire experts, and the public from January through August of 2008. Those final reviews and recommendations by the Safety Codes Council were made to us in September of '08 and accepted in October of 2008. The original schedule for adoption in January of '09 was delayed until March of '09 because of the technical complexity of the regulations. We are looking at the drafting and approval and passage of those amended regulations.

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

Consultation on Employment Agencies

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Service Alberta has launched a consultation on regulations related to employment agencies in the province. Apparently, it is intended to cover issues such as whether employment agencies should be required to disclose to their clients the types of fees agencies are or are not allowed to charge and what extra services these agencies should be allowed to offer. My question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. Is this consultation an admission that your ministry's regulations haven't properly protected the clients of employment agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this consultation that was just announced today, this is going to be a consultation that will go until the end of April, April 30. What's really important is that there are many examples where we have been able to enforce and charge individuals. What we want to do is improve and update the regulations to ensure that they're effective as we move forward as the economy recovers in the months and the years ahead. This is a really important consultation.

Mr. Xiao: My first supplemental to the same minister: given there have been examples of a worker being charged fees by employment agencies despite the fact that it's against the law, will you address this as a part of your consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta takes allegations of fees being charged to workers very seriously. This consultation will give our investigators even stronger tools to ensure that our regulations are being followed and, as well, encourage individuals to come forward when they are in situations that are untenable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. My last supplemental to the same minister: shouldn't this review have happened several years ago, when our economy was booming and the foreign workers were flooding to the province? Isn't reviewing the regulation at this point too late?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a good time to review it. It hasn't been reviewed for about 10 years. We know the economy has changed in Alberta. We know there are different challenges and different labour areas. We know there are many foreign workers that are working here in Alberta and will continue to come. This is about the future and doing the right thing.

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

Wood Buffalo Municipal Issues

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week while I was meeting with the mayor and councillors from the region of Wood

Buffalo, I was surprised to learn that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has not even spoken with them since taking office. This municipality is home to thousands upon thousands of workers who are indispensable to the health of our province's economy. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's been almost three months since he took the job. Why has the minister not even met with Wood Buffalo municipal officials?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that answer is rather easy: because they haven't asked to meet with me. I want to indicate that upon becoming Minister of Municipal Affairs, I did meet with quite a number of municipalities across the province. Just recently we concluded the very, very successful conference of AAMD and C where all of the rural municipalities were represented. I will upon request meet with them if they want to talk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that their most pressing need is for the provincial government to accept their census methodology so they can receive the amount of funding they're entitled to, an amount of funding that relates directly to the number of people who actually live in Fort McMurray, why has the minister done nothing to solve the problem?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I need to make it clear to this House that we've got 359 municipalities. Each and every one of them is special in their own way, and each and every one of them has particular issues. As they address those issues to me, I work with them.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I'm only asking about one of them today.

Given that the municipality doesn't have enough experienced planners on staff to develop Parsons Creek so that Fort McMurray can have housing available for the next boom, which could start in, oh, I don't know, six months, what is the minister doing right now to help them fast-track this process?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding – and that's made available through other municipalities – that some of that particular land is available. We work with all municipalities, including Fort McMurray, with the existing programs and support services that we have, and we'll continue to do that with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Supports for Disabled Persons

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're a province that prides itself on independence and self-initiative. Many people believe that if you want a better life, it's up to you to work hard. However, for some Albertans, including those with disabilities, this is a lot more difficult, if not next to impossible. My questions are for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Minister, what are we doing as a government to help Albertans who may have very limited options for earning an income?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we are a very proud province, and we can be proud of our support for those most in need. This includes the assured income for the severely handicapped program, or AISH, which provides monthly financial and supplementary health benefits to about 40,000 adult Albertans with severe

and permanent disabilities. To support those AISH clients who can and want to work, we have income exemptions in place that allow clients to earn some employment income and still receive a level of AISH benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Because mobility is another concern and because a disabled man in my community is struggling to repair or replace his wheelchair, is there any help available to obtain wheelchairs or other assistive devices to help Albertans with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, our government's commitment to those most in need can also be seen through many of the programs delivered by my ministry, including the Alberta aids to daily living program, or AADL. AADL is a \$113 million program that provides financial assistance to approximately 80,000 Albertans each year to purchase medical equipment and supplies such as wheelchairs. Clients can also receive assistance with repairs to equipment provided by AADL.

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

Patient Safety Report

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services finally released the independent report into incidents at the Alberta Children's hospital. The report suggests a picture of a physician with a chronically difficult personality overruling a nurse and ordering her to give a small child a potentially life-threatening dose of painkiller. The management of the Children's hospital appears to have failed to prevent the situation even though warning signs had accumulated. To the minister of health: if this situation can happen at the Children's hospital, what is the minister doing to ensure that it is not happening elsewhere?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are about 80 recommendations in that Health Quality Council report which was released on Thursday. I can assure you that Alberta Health Services is doing everything within their powers and in their capacity to address not only those four incidents but other recommendations that will help prevent those kinds of incidents in the future.

Dr. Taft: Well, the minister has said that he has read the report cover to cover. He'll know, then, that this report uses some pretty startling language such as "ineffective," not inappropriate, "not respectful," and on page 28 speaks of "disruptive behaviour by physicians that interferes with the provision of safe patient care." Given that five months have passed, have policies been put in place in those five months to fix the problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that exact section has yet been addressed and implemented, but I can tell you that immediately upon receiving the report, even before it was made public, staff, professional providers, and others at the Alberta Children's hospital acted immediately on areas where they could, and a lot of those recommendations were implemented almost right at that time.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear from the report that there is a particular physician whose behaviour has contributed heavily to the problems with a large overdose of painkillers to a very small

child and given that this behaviour appears to be ongoing, has the minister ordered any special measures be taken to deal with this particular physician?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no, I haven't. If it's an issue of that gravity, then there is certainly a mechanism in place, and it's called a complaint to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They are the ones who deal with doctor discipline and actions against doctors or comments about performance or diagnoses or whatever it might be.

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

School Closures

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has spoken publicly in this Legislature of the importance of having community services integrated in schools and schools being integrated into the community, yet schools are still being closed in the inner city. The school boards are saying that it's the province that's pressuring them to close. My question is to the Minister of Education. What Alberta Department of Education legislation or regulations are contributing to schools in the inner city being closed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, actually, there are no legislative policies or regulations which would contribute to that type of decision-making.

Ms Blakeman: It's the utilization rates, and you know it.

Mr. Hancock: Utilization rates do not actually contribute to the idea of closing schools. Utilization rates are utilized with respect to whether or not new schools are needed.

What might actually impact a school board's decision is the plant operation and maintenance funding formula, which funds on a per-student basis. So if you don't have enough students in a school or if the school is larger and more difficult to heat and operate, that might actually impact a decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can government possibly encourage schools to pursue wraparound service partnerships when the schools that are pioneering such practices in older, often higher social needs communities are the first schools up for closure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm glad that we have the trustees from Edmonton public school board here today so I can say yet again what I've said in the past in this House. The city centre school project in Edmonton public, which was put together a number of years ago, demonstrates exactly how to do it. They created a better opportunity for education for the children in that area. Yes, a couple of schools were closed, but the receiving schools were renovated, and what they've created are partnerships with the community to provide better supports for those students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: what can your

ministry do to encourage services such as children and family services and community health services to be offered within the school walls?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite a lot of work is happening with respect to so-called wraparound services. There are some 35 mental health capacity building projects across the province, which are piloting those kinds of projects. Again, we also should be encouraging – and I have been encouraging – Children and Youth Services, Health, and other community agencies to actually co-locate, where appropriate, with schools. In fact, that can also have another benefit, and that is that if excess school space is used for other public purposes, it actually can be taken out of the utilization formula.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Questions are being raised in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie about how AISH supports Albertans with disabilities; specifically, what happens to AISH clients' benefits when they enter an institution like a hospital for extended periods of time. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is it true that AISH clients lose their benefits soon after being admitted into hospitals?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad I have the opportunity to provide members of the Assembly with factual information about our support for AISH clients who are admitted to institutions. If an AISH client is temporarily admitted to an institution, he or she continues to receive AISH benefits for three months while receiving treatment, and this can be extended for up to six months in total. This continuation of AISH benefits makes it much easier for clients to transition back to the community and their homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental to the same minister: what happens then? After the six months does that client get off AISH?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, clients in an institution more than six months stop receiving AISH as they have their basic needs taken care of by the facility. They are again eligible for AISH when they are discharged, and they can be eligible to have their benefits rapidly reinstated. This means the client's file can be reopened without the client having to apply or undergo another medical assessment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: looking at the longer term, what happens to AISH clients when they become seniors? Do they continue to be supported?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we continue to support these Albertans as they become seniors. As it has been for many years, when AISH clients become seniors, they transition to being eligible for both federal and provincial seniors' benefits. In Alberta we have one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors'

benefits in the country. This package includes the Alberta seniors' benefit, which provides a monthly cash benefit to supplement federal income programs as well as the dental and optical assistance programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the close proximity of the University of Calgary to my constituency I've been getting lots of feedback from students about the proposed market modifiers for some postsecondary programs that will result in huge tuition increases. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is driving the postsecondary institutions to come forward with these proposals? Is it because there was already a gap between revenues and the cost of delivering this program, or is it a result of the tuition cap policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposals are being presented to us based on what has happened over a number of years with the tuition fee policy in the province of Alberta. At the outset let's be clear: this is about something that at this point in time is speculative. These are proposals that have come forward; we're reviewing them. Some institutions have put forward proposals where they believe that an anomaly existed when we froze tuitions back in 2004. We're still reviewing those proposals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that answer. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: is a tuition cap policy appropriate when we're competing with other jurisdictions who don't have such a policy while also striving to maintain high postsecondary program standards?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. It is a very difficult balancing act. We look at the affordability framework with our students. We look at the partnership between postsecondary students, the taxpayers, and society and the economy. We have to balance those things. We are as a government fully committed to the tuition fee policy. We have a top-notch, top-quality postsecondary education system. We need to make sure that it's accessible and affordable. By limiting annual tuition fee increases to the consumer price index, we're ensuring that the increases are predictable so that students can plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the minister's comments there, particularly at the end, because I know that a lot of my constituents have come to me lately with some concerns about drastic increases in fees. We've seen that on the Alberta nongroup plan benefits. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology in his capacity as Deputy Premier. What is the overall strategy that this government is doing to protect our constituents from massive increases in one year?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's kind of a mixture of

apples and oranges when we're talking about Blue Cross coverage, but those are costs and fees that are of a different nature. I can only say that as it relates to regular fees that the government has control over, we try to make sure that it's a recovery basis. We try to ensure that it's fair, that it's reasonable. Certainly, sometimes you have to catch up if you don't do it on a regular basis, and that's something we need to take into consideration. The only thing I can say on the tuition fee policy is that we stand by it a hundred per cent. This year the institutions wanted to make cases for exceptional fees. We're going to look at and review those. That's the only thing I've agreed to.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. President of the Treasury Board wishes to supplement an answer given the other day. That will then allow a member on I think it was the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to raise a question with additional response.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

MLA Remuneration

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked about the authority to fund work on government committees after an election. I want to point out to you, as is stated in the guidelines on dissolution of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, that government committees, boards continue to operate until their remuneration is changed by order in council, ministerial order, or resignation from the appointment, meaning that these continue to operate, as government does, until the day of the election, so they are funded as such.

There is no retroactive payment involved. They simply operate under a new order, and that was OC 187/2008, which identifies if there are changes in the fee schedule or changes in membership. So to his question of retroactivity, there is none. As to paying retroactive payments back to any of these government members, there is not. They simply exist until the new order in council.*

The Speaker: That allows an additional question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the President of the Treasury Board: what we're interested in is the paper trail that validates what the government has been ascertaining. Could we please get a copy of all the orders in council and ministerial orders that track the appointment of the individual members to those cabinet policy committees? You've given us one. If we could get the rest of them, please.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, all orders in council are public. I'll be happy to work with the hon. members and find which one would identify the authority that committed originally to fund these committees that was replaced by OC 187/2008.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were, with those last three exchanges, 121 questions and responses in the Assembly today. Twenty individual members were recognized: nine from the Official Opposition, two from the third party in the House, one from the fourth party, and eight from the government private members.

In 15 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Haiti Relief Efforts

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize the fundraising efforts for Haiti by some Alberta businessmen. As you know, an earthquake hit Haiti, which led to the deaths of many and the loss of homes and essential infrastructure. As always, we Canadians did what we could to try and help this devastated nation. Our Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, and our Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, supported and provided aid to the people of Haiti. Our own province showed leadership on this issue by donating \$500,000 to the Red Cross.

At the same time, the United Sikhs organization went to Haiti with six doctors and many volunteers to prepare and distribute food to the people of Haiti. The local Sikh community here in Alberta also fund raised for the cause, raising approximately \$60,000. Our first religious leader, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, taught us to give 10 per cent of our earnings to those who need it most, and we take that seriously. The Sikh community in British Columbia also managed to raise \$1.5 million to help the victims in Haiti.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Rashamdeep Mundy and Shavi Kachroo to the Assembly. They own a company called Bell Connections, and they have 13 locations in Alberta that provide jobs for many. I am happy to say that they are holding an event on April 11 to raise money for the relief efforts in Haiti on top of other charities they are involved in. They're inviting all the Members of the Legislative Assembly to the event. They have invitations for all MLAs. Tickets are \$5, and all proceeds will help the earthquake victims. They will match all funds raised out of their own pockets on top of paying for the entertainment themselves. I would like to thank them for their efforts. God bless them and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

World Water Day

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is the very essence of life itself. No creature on this planet can exist without it. In addition, our industries – oil and gas, agriculture, transportation, recreation, medicine – and every aspect of life in Alberta revolve around water.

On this World Water Day Albertans are faced with a chilling prospect. Parts of our province, particularly the South Saskatchewan basin, will run short as our need for water outstrips supply. Already people in southern Alberta are piping water between river basins. We're now scrambling to revise our century old licensing, based on who got there first. A responsible government would have anticipated this problem many years ago, but this administration doesn't seem to know the meaning of planning for the long term. A responsible government would ensure that water sources are protected and complete an inventory of Alberta's surface and groundwater, establishing a comprehensive, effective water quality monitoring program.

Safe drinking water is a fundamental human right. A responsible government would require more transparent approvals for coal-bed methane projects and require independent scientific analysis of changes to groundwater quality and quantity. A responsible government would act now to deal actively with the risks of climate change, which increases the severity of droughts and floods, with the associated impacts on fresh water supply, management, and treatment. A responsible government would protect wetlands with a no net-loss policy. We would protect our supply of drinking water by always giving priority to basic human needs as well as to ensure in-stream flows. We do not support a water market.

*See page 545, left column, paragraph 3

Albertans, particularly farmers and other rural residents, already know through bitter experience that fresh water is increasingly precious. In recent years they fought against interbasin transfers and demanded that this administration do a better job of protecting Alberta's water. I hope this World Water Day the Premier will follow the advice of Albertans and act to preserve this province's most precious resource.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Kinosoo Performing Arts Association

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, March 20, I attended the 30th anniversary celebration for the Kinosoo Performing Arts Association in Cold Lake. Approximately 300 guests were in attendance to celebrate the success of KPAA and to listen to an incredible performance by the Chevelles from Lethbridge. This celebration was truly a milestone for Bonnyville-Cold Lake because it showed how many individuals are willing to support the arts in my community.

The Kinosoo Performing Arts Association was founded in 1979 with a mission to strengthen and invigorate this community through performing arts, and over the past three decades this vision has become a reality.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta communities benefit greatly from hosting professional entertainers, especially rural areas that only get up to four or five special acts a year. It gives residents of all ages an opportunity to go to a show or concert and take part in a new experience.

I want to thank all the volunteers and members of the community who've supported the arts by helping out in the KPAA organization and by purchasing tickets to the incredible shows that they bring to our area. I believe that performing arts is vital to the growth and development of all communities, and I would like to congratulate them on 30 years of success in the Cold Lake area.

Thank you very much.

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

Red Cross Haiti Relief Efforts

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the work of Albertans who have joined with the Canadian Red Cross to respond to the desperate needs of the people of Haiti following the devastating earthquake of January 12.

From January 13 to February 16 alone dozens of Red Cross volunteers in eight offices across Alberta put in nearly 5,000 hours processing donations. During the early days staff and volunteers worked long hours to accept generous donations from children as young as four, seniors, church and community groups, and the business community. To date donations from Alberta total more than \$3 million, including the \$500,000 donated by this government to the Haiti disaster appeal. These funds will help to ensure critical needs for food, water, temporary shelter, and medical services can be met in this struggling island nation.

2:50

But Alberta's response doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Today some 68 Canadian Red Cross members are among 600 international delegates sent to Haiti to support this massive humanitarian mission, the largest single-country disaster response in Red Cross history. Included in this number are four selfless, caring Alberta Red Cross delegates: Dave Bateman, Iain Logan, Dr. Dennis Filips, and,

departing today, Leslie Leach, who will take on the role of head of operations as Red Cross begins the work of constructing temporary homes for 30,000 Haitians left homeless and facing the fast-approaching monsoon season. This operation is part of a 10-year plan to help rebuild Haiti, and more Albertans will be part of this long-term mission.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Alberta's Red Cross staff and volunteers are grateful for this amazing outpouring of generosity, and they are honoured by the trust that Albertans have shown in them, but I also know that this House and all Albertans are even more honoured and, indeed, humbled by their amazing commitment to helping fellow citizens in need whether here at home or abroad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Brian McKeever

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and recognize Canmore's Brian McKeever, an incredible Albertan athlete who recently wrapped up his 2010 Paralympic participation yesterday by winning a third gold medal.

Brian started skiing at the age of three, was competing at the age of 13, and at the age of 19 this gifted young man began to lose his vision. While some would let this kind of obstacle end their career, Brian persevered. If his participation in the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games isn't a demonstration of his determination, then perhaps his legacy is. He has now participated in three Winter Paralympic Games and won a total of 10 medals.

There is no doubt that many young Canadians have followed his story, resolving to pursue their own dreams of achieving an Olympic or Paralympic medal in spite of a disability or a challenge. Brian is truly an inspiration to any aspiring athlete, and his incredible perseverance and successes are a victory for all Canadians. I know I speak for this entire Assembly as I wish heartfelt congratulations to Brian, his brother and guide Robin, and to all our country's Paralympic athletes.

Thank you. [applause]

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

World Water Day

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Water Day, established by the United Nations to focus the world's attention on our water and encourage countries around the world to take action to safeguard the quality and quantity of this essential resource. This year the theme is Clean Water for a Healthy World.

On World Water Day Albertans can be assured that our province has some of the best and safest drinking water in North America, and we're always working to ensure it stays that way. The water for life strategy is the province's long-term strategy for managing Alberta's water resources. The strategy, combined with the water for life action plan, demonstrates government's commitment to ensuring a healthy and sustainable water supply for the environment, our communities, and our economic well-being.

Since 2004 the government of Alberta has completed 23 key actions set out under water for life. These achievements have totalled about \$600 million. This morning the government announced further investment in Alberta's water sources. A two-year \$500,000 provincial grant will enable the newly formed Athabasca Watershed Council to help build a common understanding of the issues and opportunities within their watershed. This marks the 10th watershed planning and advisory council in the province and yet one

more partner contributing to the achievements of the water for life goals. I commend the Athabasca Watershed Council as its members embark upon the road of leadership, stewardship, and education.

I encourage all Albertans to help protect our precious water resources not only on World Water Day but each and every day. Thank you.

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

Budget 2010

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9 this government tabled Budget 2010, a budget that helps put Alberta in the strongest financial position of all provinces as we head into economic recovery. We have and will continue to have the most innovative and competitive economy in Canada, and we will have the best infrastructure in North America.

Mr. Speaker, some have criticized this government for running a shadow deficit when it comes to capital. Nothing could be further from the truth. The government's capital investment is not hidden. The government publishes the information as part of its annual fiscal plan and quarterly updates. The Alberta government follows accounting standards set by an independent, nonpartisan national body.

Others such as TD Bank Financial Group endorse our reporting methods, as seen in their 2010 Alberta Budget document. TD Bank states that capital investment is rightly excluded as an expense in the year that it is booked but, rather, is expensed through annual amortization over time as the asset is employed to benefit Albertans. This is also the best time to invest in our public infrastructure. Current deflationary pressures mean lower costs for capital projects and present opportunities for additional cost containment in capital projects, meaning that this is the best time to invest in our public infrastructure instead of putting it off like some would like us to do. TD Bank also points out that our sustainability fund was used as intended, to protect Albertans' programs from sudden drops in our volatile revenue.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is good for Alberta. It lays the foundation for our future prosperity by building the infrastructure of tomorrow, and it does so in a responsible and cost-effective manner. I will be pleased to table TD Bank Financial Group's 2010 Alberta Budget document after question period.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This government is committed to promoting integrity and public confidence in the local election process by setting appropriate election standards. These proposed changes clarify and support the fundamental principles of the act. The proposed amendments will assist electors and designate their one residence for the purpose of voting in a general election. The amendments will also help ensure an open and transparent process for campaign contributions and, among other things, extend the in-force date of some provisions related to campaign funds to allow more time for the candidates,

municipalities, and election officials to comply with the new rules, ease restrictions on modest, self-funded campaigns and on donation caps, and ease requirements audits on financial statements. If adopted, the act would make amendments to the Local Authorities Election Act, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, and the Municipal Government Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 9 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, from the delivery of the budget back on February 9, 2010, by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise five all-party standing committees of the Legislative Assembly have spent some 72 hours reviewing and debating the budget. This budget truly strikes the balance between focusing on Alberta's priorities while eliminating spending.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must advise that under Standing Order 7(7) "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily Routine will be deemed to be concluded, and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Government House Leader.

3:00

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to suspend the provisions of Standing Order 7(7) for this afternoon?

The Speaker: On the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader I'm only going to ask one question: does anybody disagree? If you disagree, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I had the privilege of introducing leaders in our First Nations and Métis communities in this province, leaders whose purpose for education has been in alignment and people who have made very significant efforts to improve the educational outcomes for First Nations and Métis students in the province. Today I am pleased to table two documents that evidence that kind of leadership.

The first is a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Partnership Council document, which was executed effective October 13, 2009, involving myself as Minister of Education, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for the government as well as the grand chief of Treaty 6, Chief Eddy Makokis; the grand chief of Treaty 7, Chief Charles Weasel Head; the deputy chief of Treaty 8, Chief Rose Laboucan; and President Gerald Cunningham and President Audrey Poitras from the Métis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, respectively. The agreement forms a partnership between those parties for the pursuance of First Nations and Métis education in the province.

I also would like to table a historic memorandum of understanding which was executed effective February 24 of this year between the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8, being, again, Chief Alan Adam, Chief Makokis, and Chief Weasel Head as well as myself as Minister of Education and then signed as well by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs and also by the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Chuck Strahl. Again, a historic document where all of these parties are coming together to emphasize the importance of education and particularly of eliminating the achievement gap for First Nations and Métis students in our province.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I haven't been a great fan of the current budget process as we're debating millions of dollars a minute in many cases. At this point I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of questions that I was not able to ask the Minister of Environment during our 2010-2011 Environment estimates due to time constraints. We had an hour and 20 minutes split between us, and I still couldn't get through all questions. I look forward to receiving the minister's written response.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated in my member's statement, I wish to table the requisite five copies of the TD Bank Financial Group's 2010 Alberta budget document.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 21, 2010, marked the 80th anniversary of the designation of the wild rose as Alberta's floral emblem. First Nations and early settlers depended on the wild rose for a host of remedies and other domestic uses. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document outlining the importance of the wild rose in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a single letter written and signed by Gloria Singendonk expressing concerns about the potential closure of Sir William Van Horne vocational high school in my constituency of Calgary-Varsity. This school has served students for over 40 years, keeping them in school and allowing them to graduate because of its special programs. She sent this letter to the minister on March 1 and indicates: "Neither he nor

his office has acknowledged receipt or honoured my request for follow up."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 56 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table copies of the School at the Legislature report card 2008-2009. This is, as we heard today, a Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students cosponsored with community partners Priority Printing, Access Media Group, CKUA radio network, Via Rail Canada, and the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club.

Are there others?

Hon. members, I'm going to call Orders of the Day momentarily, but as Monday is private members' day, there's a request that will be made momentarily by a member to switch a position on motions for returns, I do believe. That motion for a return is under motions. I advised the hon. member when he talked to me some days ago that what he should do is send a letter, a memo, to all members of the Assembly advising them that he would rise on this day and request such unanimous consent.

All members will know that we do have a process. It was outlined by myself in a memo to all hon. members on June 15, 2009. The time frame outlined in that process is now past, so I'm now going to recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert with his request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to change motions other than government motions 507 to 508 and 508 to 507. I have consulted with the Member for West Yellowhead, who presently has number 508, and I have sent memos to all of the House leaders as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Is any hon. member opposed to this request? If so, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be very succinct. From the first reading through the second reading and now into committee

members of my caucus have supported Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As we have noted for the record, it follows in the tradition of the good work done by a former MLA for Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, in terms of extending protection to firefighters. It takes that protection one step further, acknowledging activities that may have occurred while fighting fires – chemical inhalation, et cetera – that had the unfortunate circumstance of leading to varieties of cancers. By providing firefighters and their families, I might add, with this protection, we are valuing the work they do on a daily basis on our behalf in terms of protecting not only us but our property as well.

I mentioned during the debate during the second reading of this bill that I would like to see the types of benefits that have been provided for firefighters extended to other first responders, including paramedics and police. There is no doubt that when there is a fire, it is the firefighters who have the primary responsibility and potentially put their lives at the greatest risk. In carrying out the support services, whether it be the paramedics or the police officers who are in the vicinity of the chemicals that are unfortunately being let loose into the air, I would like to think that at some point in the near future their valuable contributions and the role they play as team members of emergency services be recognized.

3:10

The government is also bringing forth legislation to protect individuals involved in search and rescue operations. These bills work together extremely well to provide protection, in some cases in the case of liability, in others with regard to medical recognition of injuries suffered.

Therefore, to conclude, Mr. Chair, not only myself but the members of the Liberal Official Opposition are supportive of Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and look forward to seeing it proclaimed.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was prepared to open debate, but I'm quite pleased that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity opened debate, and I certainly thank him for his words of support for Bill 201. I'd like to thank in addition to the colleague from Calgary-Varsity all colleagues from both sides of the House for sharing their thoughts and comments over the course of second reading.

I'd like to just quickly review the primary components of Bill 201. Mr. Chairman, the bill was designed to provide further coverage for firefighters under the presumptive legislation we currently have in place. Specifically, section 2 of Bill 201 requires that section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act be amended by adding subsection (4.1). It reads:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, section 2 of this bill will add an additional subsection, that being (4.2), requiring that "a regulation made under subsection (4.1) may be subject to the requirements of subsection (4)(b) prescribing periods of employment." That speaks to the length of time that a firefighter would have been exposed over the course of his career prior to being eligible for this coverage. This is important to note as we must follow guidelines that have already been put in place with regard to the length of employment before coverage applies.

The final component of Bill 201 is section 3, which reads: "This Act comes into force on Proclamation." As with other private

members' bills, Mr. Chairman, it is imperative to do this to ensure time for the needed consultation by the department affected, in this case that being the Ministry of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Chairman, presumptive legislation can be seen all across Canada, and as stated in our earlier debate, Alberta was one of the first to introduce such legislation, in 2003. For that I think we have the former member from Calgary Mr. Magnus – I guess I can say that; he's no longer a member of the House – that was the champion of that piece of legislation at the time.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 is simply adding to this legislation and to the good work that was done at the time as more scientific research has come to light. To this point firefighters and researchers have indicated links to esophageal and testicular cancer. That is why Bill 201 has come forward: to help assure those that protect us that they will be looked after should their worst fears come true and they are diagnosed with either of these cancers.

Mr. Chairman, according to the International Association of Fire Fighters there are approximately 10 firefighters that lose their lives annually as a result of job-related cancers in Canada. Many have attributed the increase in cancers to the greater use of synthetics in building materials. The risk is not necessarily from the inhalation of fumes; rather, it is the absorption of these dangerous chemicals through the skin. The uniforms that these men and women wear in doing their job are designed to breathe, and as such, although that is a good feature to have, the reality is that it also allows some of these materials to be absorbed into the skin of these firefighters.

I'd like to take this opportunity to address some of the questions brought forward by my hon. colleagues during second reading. I thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Calgary-Varsity for raising the issue of extending presumptive legislation to other professions – the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity just raised that again – including all responders. While I believe that there may be cause for this, Bill 201 is specific to firefighters because of the evidence that has been presented to governments across North America. I might also mention, Mr. Chairman, for the benefit of the hon. member, that what we are doing by Bill 201 is amending an existing piece of legislation that already exists that is specific to firefighters.

Now, at some point in the future you, myself, or someone else may very well want to bring forward another piece of legislation that would address these other responders. I might also add: it has been brought up by many members in this House that it would be desirable to extend this protection to volunteer firefighters as well. I, too, would agree, Mr. Chairman, that that is very desirable because, as we know, a large portion of the firefighting community right across this province is comprised of volunteers. But at this time this particular piece of legislation will be amending what is already in place for full-time firefighters. I'm certainly looking forward to the opportunity where we may one day be discussing something specific to volunteer firefighters.

Cancer is a devastating disease, Mr. Chairman, and I imagine that each of us has been affected in some way by cancer. I believe that by passing Bill 201, we can provide comfort in a time of uncertainty to firefighters and their families. I believe that we all recognize the importance of firefighters to our communities and just how vital these brave men and women are. Many of us have had experience at the municipal level as mayors, reeves, and councillors, and these roles have put us in direct daily contact with firefighters. Many members spoke of personal stories where firefighters were called on to save their homes, barns, businesses, and animals, and as a result those members may have an even greater appreciation of firefighters.

Last year Edmonton lost two of its finest to cancer all in the

course of two weeks. These were two captains, Mr. Chairman. In fact, it was the sixth in the span of a few years. This is an all too stark reality, that reminds firefighters of the hidden dangers of their jobs. Not only that, but one of these fine men passed away from esophageal cancer and was therefore not eligible for WCB benefits.

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

Mr. Chairman, the firefighters of this province have been very instrumental in having esophageal cancer and testicular cancer added to the presumptive list of cancers that are currently listed in regulation. They have been advocating for these changes to government for several years. You might remember that during second reading we were graced by some probably 50 members in uniform in the gallery from all across this province. As well, we had a delegation here from the city of Winnipeg, showing how important this is to the firefighter fraternity all across our country. By adding the aforementioned cancers, we're giving firefighters just a little more peace of mind.

3:20

I would like to thank all Alberta firefighters for their dedication to the people of this province. Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 would extend presumptive legislation to include esophageal and testicular cancer. By doing so, firefighters and their families across this province will indeed have more peace of mind.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the committee debate on Bill 201. Again, I thank all hon. members for their concern for these firefighters, and I thank the members for their participation and kind words.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Firstly, I would like to commend the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing this exceptionally important bill forward and having this debate in the House. Certainly, we on this side and I do support Bill 201. It's a protection for those who protect us, and unfortunately some have died in the performance of that duty. They are exposed to all kinds of different pollutants and toxic materials, in particular in the form of inhalation.

My colleagues have also put forward the idea that first responders could be included under this legislation, and I agree. The reason that I do is because in Lethbridge we have a very effective firefighter-paramedic dual service. It is extremely effective, and it should remain intact. The most important part of our emergency service is the dispatch, and to centralize it out of local areas I think is a mistake. I think we need to have dispatch that can act instantly and understand who they're talking to and where they're actually going.

But, Mr. Chair, I have digressed. I'll be very brief. I think this is a very important bill. We should all support it. In passing it, not only will we protect those that protect us, but we also will recognize and respect the firefighters and the job that they do for us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise today and participate in Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the

Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I really don't need a prepared script to speak to this particular bit of legislation because in prior lives I have worked and served on a number of volunteer fire departments. I know the risks and also the rewards that firefighters face when they're looking after the protection of both life and property of those that they're charged to take care of.

Alberta firefighters provide a service to Albertans that, you know, really is vital, Mr. Chairman. It's necessary for us, I think, to talk about what the risks and rewards are that are in place for some of these people. The amendments that we have in Bill 201, particularly when you talk about the presumptive cancers for firefighters, take into account the realities of the work and the realities of the job. My biggest concern with the whole issue – and it's very well identified in the bill – comes from the fact that as a volunteer firefighter you never really know what's burning until you get there. You never really know what's in the flammable materials that you're dealing with.

Standards have changed a lot, Mr. Chairman. You know, all departments, both volunteer and professional, do everything that they can do to protect their members. There have been, in days gone by, times where it was not uncommon for volunteer members particularly to be directly exposed to toxic materials on scene; for example, to enter into a scene without wearing proper self-contained breathing apparatus. They got in, they got the job done, and they got out. Standards today are quite a bit different than they were in the early 1980s.

We have one case that I think we all know of in Saskatoon where a number of firefighters responded to a fire at a dump not knowing that the University of Saskatchewan had dumped radioactive waste at that particular facility. The upshot of that was that since that fire in the 1980s, half of the people that responded to that fire have in fact died of cancer.

You don't enter into a scene and you don't do that particular kind of work thinking about the consequences of your actions, necessarily; you do it for a wide variety of service reasons. At the end of the day we do need to afford these folks protection, and we do need to make it so that they do not have to prove a direct correlation between the particular disease that they have and the time that they served as a volunteer or as a professional firefighter.

Eliminating the requirement for correlation is a huge step forward. Expanding that list of presumptive cancers, you know, to include esophageal and primary site testicular cancer is going to help them all. It gives everyone a little bit of confidence as they're in that particular situation and makes sure that the people who do the jobs that we ask them to, in fact, carry forward and get those jobs done.

Mr. Chairman, it's an important piece of work that is done by firefighters in this province, and I would urge all members to support this particular piece of legislation. Again, I thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for having the foresight and the courage to bring this forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just wanted to put on the record, as I have previously done, my thanks to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon not only for bringing forward the legislation but working with the opposition parties in terms of clarification.

I appreciate the fact, as he has explained, that this bill is very specific to firefighters and that it is, in fact, an amendment to a previously established act. I very much appreciate his comments

with regard to the need for legislation follow-up to extend to other first responders. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out that you can't separate the job description for a number of individuals in the case not only of Lethbridge but in a variety of volunteer firefighting organizations in rural areas throughout the province. Hopefully, when that volunteer answers the call, that protection will extend to them.

I also have previously pointed out and just would want to emphasize that as well as looking after firefighters' and first responders' physical well-being, we need to be cognizant of their mental well-being. I would encourage legislation to be brought forward with regard to providing posttraumatic stress treatment for our first responders, which is the equivalent to what the RCMP and our military are already experiencing.

On a lighter note, Mr. Chair, I'd just like to share on the record my firefighting experience that occurred in the summer of 2003 when the Lost Creek fire was raging in the Crowsnest Pass, and all throughout the Kananaskis area fire bans were in place. Now, as one of my responsibilities in working for Cataract Creek, I had a large water tank on the back of my pickup truck. Being a concerned citizen, I noticed what I took to be a raging fire on the Eden Valley reserve. Because I felt that this matter needed to be attended to directly, I didn't stop at the band office. I thought I'd better get there and try to put this out to whatever extent I could. When I got to what I thought was a house fire, it turned out that it was actually a garbage fire. So I stopped by the band council chief's office and apologized for almost attempting to put out their garbage fire, which would have caused considerable confusion for reigniting.

My experience was not nearly as dangerous as those faced on a regular basis, but it is important for the front-line firefighters. At some time in the near future, hopefully, we'll recognize the need to protect first responders through government legislation as opposed to private members' bills.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, and thanks again to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this very progressive, protective legislation.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As my colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned, firefighters certainly are among the most highly respected of all of our professions, and I think there is very good reason for that. They're often, of course, the first responders at a wide variety of emergency scenes. They do play an integral part in keeping Albertans safe and willingly put themselves in the path of danger in order to protect our homes, our businesses, and our lives on a regular basis.

Mr. Chairman, during second reading debate on Bill 201 the Assembly heard about the bravery and dedication of Alberta's firefighters. We've heard about many of the hazards that these men and women face in order to keep us as Albertans safe. In my home city of Calgary 21 firefighters have died in the line of duty, and 12 of those died as a result of compensatory cancer. During debate we also heard about career firefighters who have developed esophageal or testicular cancer and who are not covered under the current workers' compensation legislation, and we heard about the added toll that this lack of protection has taken on our firefighters and on their families.

The Workers' Compensation Act is a scheme of legislation that provides Albertans with no-fault compensation for workplace injury

or illness. It does however take away the right of an injured or an ill worker to sue for any pecuniary losses which might have occurred as a direct result of those injuries or illness if it was incurred during the course of their employment and during the course of their duties on the job. The act provides benefits, including money paid for lost wages, health care, and other associated costs. It is a disability insurance system that's designated for those people who have been injured or made ill because of their work-related illness or injury.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's worth noting that eight types of cancer are already recognized in provincial regulations for firefighters with respect to presumption. They are leukemia, brain cancer, bladder cancer, lung cancer in nonsmokers, ureter cancer, kidney cancer, colorectal cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The fundamental problem from an evidentiary point of view is that many cancers arise from many, many different types of causes. Those causes can be both ultimate and they can be proximate. It's very difficult, if not impossible, for us to know exactly what the causes of those cancers were and when they might have arisen. The result has been that it's been extremely difficult for our firefighters to muster the evidence necessary to show that there is a nexus between the various types of cancer and the exposure to toxic compounds that they encounter in the course of their employment, sometimes years and years before a cancer arises.

Bill 201 would amend the Workers' Compensation Act to expand that list of cancers which are presumed to be work related, or presumed, in other words, to be an occupational disease for firefighters. The bill would amend section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsection (4.1), which states that the Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Under the proposed amendment firefighters who develop primary site esophageal or primary site testicular cancer would then be assured coverage under the Workers' Compensation Act. The presumption created would be that the dominant cause of these specified diseases is, in fact, the work environment, the work environment encountered by firefighters in the usual course of carrying out their duties.

The wording of the presumption is detailed in section 24.1(2) of the Workers' Compensation Act, which states:

If a worker who is or has been a firefighter suffers an injury that is a primary site cancer of a type specified in the regulations, the injury shall be presumed to be an occupational disease, the dominant cause of which is the employment as a firefighter, unless the contrary is proven.

The upshot, Mr. Chairman, is that the subsection eliminates the burden of proof that had been previously put on the firefighters to show that specified types of cancer are in fact caused by their employment.

Mr. Chairman, statutory presumptions relating to the causation of certain cancers in firefighters were first conceived in this House in 2003 by my Calgary colleague, the hon. MLA for Calgary-North Hill at the time, Richard Magnus. Since that time in 2003 we have accumulated more and more scientific evidence, and more and more research has been done which has shown us that primary site esophageal and testicular cancers may be linked to the toxic substances encountered by our firefighters. Accordingly, I would submit to my colleagues that it is reasonable that they should now be included in the list of work-related cancers. By incorporating the most recent scientific data and research available into the Workers' Compensation Act, Bill 201 will help to protect the quality of life for Alberta firefighters and their families.

The research has pointed to plausible links between the incidence

of these cancers, as I mentioned, and the working conditions of firefighters. The lead study in this was a 2006 meta-analysis that was done by a group of researchers led by a group at the University of Cincinnati. It was published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. What it did was a statistical analysis on a whole number of epidemiological studies showing how various risks of cancer were correlated with various professions.

What the researchers found in this 2006 study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* was that the incidence of prostate cancer was 28 per cent higher and testicular cancer was 100 per cent higher among firefighters, an astounding number. They also in that study concurred with the finding that the rates of occurrence of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and multiple myeloma were over 50 per cent greater among firefighters than in the general population. Mr. Chairman, these are very shocking numbers.

In my respectful submission, by including these two additional types of cancers in our province's existing presumptive legislation, we would eliminate the onerous burden of proof and ensure that Alberta firefighters who develop cancer as a result of their job will receive the compensation and protection that they deserve.

For firefighters and their families facing the physical, emotional, and financial hardships caused by cancer, WC benefits can make a very significant difference in their quality of life. In my submission, it would be only just and fair for us to update our workers' compensation legislation to reflect this new information. Because the Workers' Compensation Act is founded on those principles of protection and fairness, it's incumbent upon us as legislators to ensure that it is up to date.

Mr. Chairman, this is an important piece of legislation whose time has come. Bill 201, and specifically section 24.1(4.1), would go a long way toward strengthening the Workers' Compensation Act. It will protect these valuable members of our communities and show them that we place a high value on their contributions. I wholeheartedly support this legislation, and I urge all of my hon. colleagues in this Legislature to support the expeditious passage of the bill through the House and to protect our firefighters.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

3:40

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and join in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. First, I'd like to sincerely thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on this piece of legislation.

Bill 201 amends the Workers' Compensation Act to include two additional cancers that firefighters may claim under workmen's compensation. Specifically, section 24.1 of the act will be amended to include subsection (4.1), which reads:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal . . . and primary site testicular cancer . . . to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Mr. Chairman, adding these two cancers to the current list of cancers that firefighters may claim for under workmen's compensation is a continued show of support and respect for all the brave men and women throughout our province that serve in this capacity. Our government has always been a leader in supporting our firefighters with presumptive legislation, ensuring that they do not have to prove that the dangerous environments which they are exposed to over their professional career are the cause of a serious illness.

In 2003, for example, the Workers' Compensation Board, also known as WCB, presumptive legislation for firefighters act received royal assent in Alberta. Alberta was the second province in all of

Canada to pass this type of legislation, which recognized certain cancers as work related. Alberta was the first province to recognize seven forms of primary site cancers which are more likely to develop in firefighters than in the general population. The list of primary site cancers which are deemed an occupational disease by the Alberta government has since expanded to eight. These cancers include brain, bladder, ureter, kidney, colorectal, lung, leukemia, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Mr. Chairman, this government recognizes and appreciates the work of our province's firefighters as they risk their own personal safety to protect Albertans' lives and property. In addition to their personal safety, research shows that our provincial firefighters are also risking their long-term health when they are exposed to the toxic environment of a fire.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Chairman, having met a lot of firefighters that serve right here in the capital city of Edmonton, that when they come out to celebrate the retirement of their peers, there isn't one individual that I have met as of yet throughout the years that said that they did not want to serve in this capacity. In fact, if they had the time and energy and not further responsibilities at home, they would continue their service. But the years of service that they put in are those that are very respectful, and it's a service that has immense impact to the communities all across the province.

Furthermore, according to statistics compiled by the Workers' Compensation Board, approximately 75 per cent of work-related firefighters' deaths have been due to cancer. In the absence of presumptive legislation the firefighters that have already so bravely served the province would have to prove that their work environment was the cause of their illness. This is why presumptive legislation for firefighters is so important. It negates the need for a firefighter suffering from one of the aforementioned primary site cancers to prove that their illness was, in fact, work related. I am so proud to stand in this Assembly and say that this government took a leadership role in providing presumptive legislation for firefighters.

This leadership role was not only displayed in the passing of the legislation but also in the scope of the legislation as eight primary site cancers are included. This government has also recognized that different primary site cancers are more likely to develop with the number of years one is exposed to a fire's toxic environment. Mr. Chairman, section 24.1(4)(b) of the Workers' Compensation Act states, "Prescribing periods of employment for the purpose of subsection (3) which may be different for the different diseases designated under clause (a)." Essentially, this means that as a firefighter's career progresses, they are more prone to different types of primary site cancers. Imagine a firefighter who has served this province for over 20 years developing a terrible illness such as kidney cancer. Our government was one of the first in Canada to recognize that this illness was an occupational disease, that it was due to numbers of years of exposure to toxic chemicals, and not simply to ask the 20-year veteran, "Which fire did you contract the disease from?"

Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the committee's attention back to Bill 201, specifically section 2, which adds subsection (4.1) in section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act. This section legislates that both primary site testicular and primary site esophageal cancers be added to the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation as a work-related illness. It was already mentioned that as research surrounding these types of cancers that firefighters are more prone to evolves, so too should our presumptive legislation. The study of both primary site testicular and esophageal cancers show that these cancers are more prevalent in firefighters. Thus these two cancers should be added to the current eight primary site cancers that are currently covered under workers' compensation.

As stated, Alberta has taken a leadership role in presumptive legislation. Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, displays a continued commitment to our province's firefighters and continues to uphold Alberta's position as a leader in this particular area. It also recognizes the bravery of the men and women who expose themselves to flames, toxins, and chemicals to protect Albertans and their property from the damaging, potentially fatal effects of smoke and fire. No one can imagine what that is like.

I would like to voice my heartfelt support for Bill 201 in Committee of the Whole stage, and I would like to encourage all my colleagues to support this piece of legislation as well. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the remainder of the debate. I would encourage all to support this valuable bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm also very pleased to be able to join the debate today in Committee of the Whole on Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As with all of my colleagues, I want to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation. As you have heard, if this legislation is passed, it would then include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer under the qualifying cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation. Currently the list of presumptive cancers is set by regulation. As such, Bill 201 would amend the regulations to include these two additional cancers.

Our firefighters along with all other men and women in uniform deserve, of course, our highest respect for their service to Albertans. Time and again they put themselves in harm's way to protect our friends and family and other loved ones, so it's our duty, I think, as legislators to do what we can to support and protect them. While the latest equipment and technology help protect firefighters from fire, they can't guarantee protection from esophageal and testicular cancer. However, this will help provide them with some comfort, knowing that they and their families will receive the support that they deserve in their time of need.

3:50

Section 2 of Bill 201 adds the following after section 24.1; the new subsection (4.1) would say:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

We've heard the facts in previous debate about the recognition that there is a linkage between certain types of cancers that firefighters suffer and the fires that they fight. This legislation directs the Lieutenant Governor in Council to cover these types of cancers which have been identified as significant risk factors for firefighters.

As has been mentioned in the debate, Alberta has been a leader in this area, but I thought it might be helpful and provide some context to talk a little bit about what's happening in other jurisdictions. Numerous other provincial jurisdictions and states in the United States have implemented similar measures to formally recognize the link between firefighting and certain forms of cancer.

For example, the government of British Columbia has amended their list of cancers covered under their workers' compensation to include testicular cancer. That was in 2009. The British Columbia firefighters association is working with their government to have esophageal cancer also covered.

In May of 2003 the Assembly of Saskatchewan passed Bill 18,

which expanded the list of cancers that are covered for their firefighters. That list was expanded again in 2005 with the passage of Bill 25, which included numerous cancers, including testicular cancer and lung cancer.

Manitoba has the distinction of being the first province to enact legislation for firefighters to provide them with protection in this area. That was after consultation with firefighters and studies and other research. In 2002 Bill 5 was passed by the Manitoba Legislature, which granted automatic benefits to firefighters should they contract certain cancers after a specific number of years on the job. That act was further amended to include esophageal cancer and testicular cancer just last June, in 2009.

Again, as members have mentioned, there's been some more recent research. I think the momentum of the research is growing, and there seems to be more and more recognition of this linkage. One can go back to the mid-1990s, when the government of Ontario did a study of 5,000 Toronto firefighters: that was for the years between 1954 and 1989. At the time that was a landmark study, and it confirmed statistically that firefighters develop certain types of cancers at higher rates than other workers. That prompted quick legislative action from the Ontario government, and they issued some guidelines at the time for the handling of firefighters' brain cancer and leukemia claims before the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Today firefighters in Ontario who develop esophageal cancer are also covered under the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. Then there have been more recent changes in the fall of 2009, interestingly, which extended this presumptive legislation to part-time and voluntary firefighters as well as fire investigators.

New Brunswick has added testicular and esophageal cancers to the list of cancers, and they did that just last June.

Now, the United States has 43 states that have enacted legislation that allows firefighters and EMS providers who develop certain injuries, illnesses, and diseases to qualify for workers' compensation and other benefits. Of those 43 jurisdictions 26 states have cancer presumptive legislation enacted for firefighters, states like Alabama, Alaska, California, Massachusetts. Of those states 13 have broad or nonspecific language that can be interpreted, really, to cover all cancers. Another 11 states cover site-specific cancers that would relate to specific organ systems. So if you develop cancer in one of those named organ systems, it's presumed that the cause was your job, the firefighting. Another eight states have pending cancer presumptive legislation, including Florida and New Jersey.

So you can see, Mr. Chairman, that many jurisdictions, in fact probably most jurisdictions, in North America have acted in one way or another to cover firefighters should they develop cancer after a certain period of time on the job. I really feel that it's appropriate and it's timely for this Assembly to continue with its efforts and provide our firefighters and their families with the peace of mind that they deserve so that they're not going to have to fight yet another battle to receive benefits should they be stricken by one of these terrible illnesses. This is the least we can do for people who risk their lives for us daily.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this. I encourage all of my colleagues here in the Assembly to support this legislation.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

This act is being proposed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I, too, would like to thank him not only for the idea behind Bill 201 but for the well-thought-out wording of the legislation.

Section 24.1(2) states:

If a worker who is or has been a firefighter suffers an injury that is a primary site cancer of a type specified in the regulations, the injury shall be presumed to be an occupational disease, the dominant cause of which is the employment as a firefighter, unless the contrary is proven.

The subsections stated in this act spell out a scenario where our firefighters are decisively protected from two very real and very deadly forms of cancer, these of course being primary site esophageal and primary site testicular cancer. Moreover, this creates a scenario where these diseases are assumed to be a result of a firefighter's environment.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the wording proposed by this bill goes far and beyond its literal interpretation. While I recognize that the wording addresses a very specific concern, primary site cancers, I also recognize that this legislative change has many far-reaching benefits. For example, this piece of legislation, specifically subsection (2), reaffirms our commitment to Alberta's firefighters. This subsection can also enshrine Alberta's traditional place as a leader in presumptive legislation. However, I would argue that the greatest benefit of this legislation is how it supports vital, essential services in Alberta. After all, that is what firefighters are: a vital service.

For me personally, firefighters are all heroes in my eyes. Each firefighter knows that when he or she leaves their home in the morning, they may be called on to risk their life to save another. Mr. Chairman, for the most part, when we think about the services provided by firefighters, we conjure up images of brave men and women running into an inferno to save a trapped resident. This, of course, is true; however, it's not the full extent of the services operated by these brave men and women. They're often the first responders to vehicle accidents and are trained to provide life-saving services to people in need. They are front-line rescue workers who regularly save people from harm even if there is no fire, and they also are active members of the community and travel from school to school teaching about fire safety and how to treat fire with respect. In simple terms the services provided by these men and women are vital to the overall health, safety, and wellness of our communities.

Mr. Chairman, this is perhaps why Bill 201, specifically subsection (2), is so important. We as a legislative body need to create an environment that is not only welcoming to these personnel but is actively concerned with their health and welfare. We need to create an environment that recognizes that firefighters can be injured every day on the job even if they don't appear so, and we need to create an environment that looks after those who have risked their lives for our well-being.

4:00

The sad reality is that primary site testicular and esophageal cancers do disproportionately target firefighters, and until we have a cure for these diseases, they will continue to disproportionately kill our firefighters. This is our opportunity to return their dedication and commitment to saving others. Until the time a decisive cure comes, I say that it falls to us to offer supports and protection for those who have done so much to protect us. Extending workers' compensation benefits to firefighters who have contracted these types of diseases is a strong statement that this government will support those who are injured in service to the people of this province.

I would encourage everyone to support Bill 201, that supports those who would bravely support all Albertans. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to stand today and join Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. This bill is being proposed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and I would like to thank him for this inspired and beneficial legislation.

Bill 201 will amend section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsections (4.1) and (4.2). These two new subsections refer to our current presumptive legislation and regulations as well as how this bill will amend them to include two new cancers.

Mr. Chairman, the objective of this bill is to include two new cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation, specifically without the trepidation that they would not be covered for primary site testicular and esophageal cancers under the Workers' Compensation Act.

The Workers' Compensation Act with regard to firefighters uses presumptive legislation to determine compensation entitlement, application, and payment. The act protects firefighters who are diagnosed with a cancer where the primary site is among those listed in presumptive legislation by defining the illness as an occupational disease, meaning in essence that their occupation can cause cancer.

Mr. Chairman, without this legislation and the proposed amendments firefighters are exposed to consequences beyond the dangers they normally face. To me, the most important part of this bill is the reference to requirements in subsection (4.1). For the sake of clarity, this section reads as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Again, in the case of Bill 201, particularly section 24.1(4.1), these illnesses would be primary site testicular and esophageal cancers. With this type of legislation firefighters are no longer placed under the burden of proving what fire they may have developed cancer from, like they would have prior to our current legislation.

Mr. Chairman, there are currently eight cancers recognized by the Alberta government and the Workers' Compensation Board as more likely to develop in firefighters than the general population. These cancers include bladder, brain, ureter, kidney, colorectal, and lung as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In order to qualify under the primary site cancer regulation, a firefighter must prove a minimum period of exposure to the hazards of firefighting. Mr. Chairman, it is the amount of time employed before a firefighter can initiate a claim, as referenced directly from the bill. For example, to qualify for compensation for leukemia, the firefighter must have been a full-time member of a fire protection service for five years. For compensation for brain cancer it is 10 years. For bladder, lung, and ureter cancer it is 15 years. For kidney, colorectal, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma they must have been working for a fire protection service for 20 years.

As mentioned earlier, there are specific minimum employment durations allotted with different specific cancers. This lets the firefighters know that after prolonged exposure to the harmful effects of smoke inhalation and toxic substances absorbed through their skin, they will be supported. This also gives firefighters peace of mind, knowing that they and their families will be protected. Additionally, this lets firefighters go to work with the assurance that they are supported by their government and that if they were to develop primary site testicular or esophageal cancer, this legislation would ensure that they receive care and compensation.

The idea of presumptive legislation in regard to cancer as shown in section 24.1(4.1) is solidly supported by scientific evidence. Some of the most recent evidence has shown that primary site testicular and esophageal cancers can be caused by lasting exposure to toxins when fighting fires. Essentially, Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 – specifically, the addition of subsection (4.1) to section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act – is an attempt to update our current legislation and regulations to reflect new and ever-emerging scientific evidence and enhances our current legislation, and I believe that this bill succeeds in that aim.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of Alberta's firefighters and applaud them for their hard work and personal sacrifice. They truly put their lives on the line to protect Albertans and their property. The dangers a firefighter faces do not end when their shift or their careers are over. The prolonged effects of their occupation can cause serious health conditions and consequences.

I fully support this beneficial and well-thought-out legislation and would encourage all members to do the same. With that, I will conclude my comments and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today and join in the debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. This legislation was brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and I would like to thank him for his vision and foresight in bringing forward this very important piece of legislation. Bill 201 seeks to enhance the Alberta Workers' Compensation Act by expanding the presumptive cancer list for firefighters.

I find section 2, which amends section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act, adding subsection (4.1), particularly interesting. Subsection (4.1) states that

the Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

This means that Bill 201 would expand Alberta's presumptive cancer list to include primary site esophageal cancer as well as primary site testicular cancer. Mr. Chairman, this is significant because in serving our communities, firefighters are the first to respond to emergencies and are exposed to a multitude of known and unknown dangers to their health and well-being. By adding subsection (4.1), it would ensure that firefighters are fully covered under the Workers' Compensation Act.

Mr. Chairman, subsection (4.1) specifically makes reference to primary site esophageal and testicular as research is starting to show that these two cancers can develop in firefighters after regular exposure to harmful toxins over many, many years. In fact, according to the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States there are more than 70,000 substances listed as toxic. When these toxins combine, there are approximately 70 million possible toxic combinations. This is why the addition of subsection (4.1) is also necessary. This subsection would help protect firefighters from these toxins.

The role of firefighters in society is one that cannot be taken for granted. They perform various roles, and our safety is always their primary objective. Firefighting includes specific roles that fall into three categories – preventing, protecting, and responding – not to

mention that their role is expanding, Mr. Chairman. Preventing fires includes conducting visits to schools, colleges, youth and adult groups, actively engaging all community members in order to promote fire safety awareness. They respond to incidents involving fires, road traffic collisions, chemical leaks, floods, terrorist incidents, rescues of trapped people and animals, and rail, air, and marine transport incidents.

4:10

Mr. Chairman, if firefighters are the first on the scene, they may provide emergency medical services as well. Firefighters protect our businesses and our livelihoods. From motor vehicle accidents to forest fires firefighters are always there for us. The role of the modern firefighter is constantly changing to meet the needs of the community. That is why they are held in high regard around the world. They risk their lives in order to protect others, and they do this without hesitation. In this way their role is one that society cannot live without.

Every Albertan and community knows the importance of firefighters, and section 24.1(4.1) highlights this. It is difficult to fully thank firefighters for all their honourable work as words alone cannot describe our gratitude. Their role in society is invaluable. However, designating esophageal and testicular cancers as primary site cancers to which presumption applies is one way that society can show our respect for firefighters and their families. Firefighting is a profession that is exposed to various challenges and risks. Therefore, it only makes good sense to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to include section 24.1(4.1) as written in Bill 201.

Their profession is selfless, to say the least, Mr. Chairman, as they are truly our heroes. Section 24.1(4.1) may seem minor but would be an additional safety measure to protect the lives of our firefighters. Essentially, section 24.1(4.1) would be one way for Albertans to give back to our firefighters and is another way to honour and protect our firefighters as they continually protect what is most precious to us, our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

I look forward to further debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and am very pleased to say that I will support this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to join this Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his leadership in bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Chairman, all members recognize that this bill addresses a very serious work-related health issue for firefighters in our province. Through the amendments proposed in Bill 201, our government will be taking steps to strengthen Alberta's presumptive legislation framework and improve support for some of our bravest workers. We've paved the path to provide these benefits to firefighters, and this bill will extend similar compensation for additional primary site cancers.

We know the importance of safe workplaces to Albertans and Alberta business. Alberta firefighters can rest assured that we'll continue to improve support for these individuals and their families. We will ensure that those who are afflicted by work-related injuries have access to reasonable compensation. However, Mr. Chairman, as with all legislation, it needs to strike the right balance.

Specifically, we can look at section 2, which amends section 24.1

of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsection (4.2). This amendment will establish that benefits for designated primary site cancers will respect corresponding periods of employment. Mr. Chairman, the priority here is to compensate firefighters who may be suffering from an illness that was caused from their efforts to protect our communities. While I support extending compensation for the cancers outlined in this bill, I believe it's also necessary to ensure that the benefits go to those who carried out such duties over a certain length of time.

With this section we are enhancing our presumptive legislation for Alberta full-time front-line firefighters because they bear the greatest consequences from their dangerous work. These brave men and women protect the communities that are the foundation for the tremendous quality of life our province affords. Bill 201 aims to compensate those who are ill as a result of engaging in hazardous situations to aid others. Mr. Chairman, we know the hazards that fire scenes present and the consequences that can result from exposure to fires. When it comes to a certain category of occupational diseases that we're looking to compensate for, I think it's only appropriate to respect the period of employment determined by professionals.

The Workers' Compensation Board has appropriate guidelines for the forms of cancers that fall into the category of occupational diseases. These guidelines allow for a degree of accountability and assess those who apply for benefits to determine their compensation eligibility. These guidelines are reasonable, Mr. Chairman. In a case where a firefighter is applying for worker benefits for a serious disease such as leukemia, they can look to the guidelines, which state that a firefighter seeking compensation for this illness must have worked full-time for a period of five years. It's also been noted that a claimant who is suffering from one of the eligible primary site cancers must not have smoked a tobacco product in the 10 years prior to the date of his diagnosis.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is once again taking progressive action to strengthen our presumptive legislation. However, in doing so, we recognize that there need to be certain parameters set around employment periods for those forms of occupational diseases. I believe that the benefit table that the WCB has established serves as an appropriate guide. With the addition of subsection (4.2) we're respecting reasonable standards for time of employment. If individuals are to be eligible for workmen's compensation benefits, they must have been employed in the profession for an acceptable period of time and also taken efforts to protect their own health.

Alberta has long been known as a welcoming place for workers and will continue to ensure that the health and safety of those who choose to work in our province remains a top priority. However, we know that some of our professionals such as firefighters are exposed to higher risk situations. These risks carry consequences, as many members have noted in the discussion on this bill, but with the amendments that we are moving forward, our government will again be taking steps to support firefighters and their loved ones.

Mr. Chairman, I believe subsection (4.2) sets reasonable standards for eligibility. Therefore, I will be supporting Bill 201 so that it passes the Committee of the Whole stage.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member want to join the debate?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to offer some concluding remarks for this Committee of the Whole on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act,

2010. I would sincerely like to thank all hon. colleagues on both sides of the House for their comments and questions throughout this important debate. Committee of the Whole debate grants members of this Assembly the unique opportunity to examine key and fundamental aspects of legislation and, if necessary, propose amendments to improve them.

Bill 201 is clear and concise. It seeks to require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to add esophageal and testicular cancer to the list of eight cancers currently covered under the province's presumptive legislation. Mr. Chairman, these provisions build on the work this government has already undertaken and will ensure that firefighters are protected from the unseen dangers faced on the job. By adding these cancers, Alberta will keep up with other jurisdictions in Canada who have already added these cancers to their legislation. It is very important that legislation is updated as new research becomes available. The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that there has been extensive research, as a matter of fact. I certainly won't try to indulge the House with any of the details, but this is some of the material that we worked from to bring us to where we are today.

4:20

Again, I just can't say enough about the value of the work of these brave men and women who, of course, continually put themselves in harm's way. What I think is remarkable, as many who have spoken before me have said, is the dedication of these individuals. Even in light of this evidence of the hazards of this job, we know that every day these individuals get up and cheerfully go about their business, the business of protecting you and me, our families, our property, our assets, and our places of work. We just can't thank them enough.

I believe that what we have done so far under the original bill and what we seek to do under Bill 201 as we move forward from this point will certainly verify the support and certainly the high regard that we hold these individuals in. I would say that even though it's very significant to these individuals, Mr. Chairman, it's really such a small thing that we can do to add this extra layer of protection for these individuals. They put their lives on the line, certainly, and not only their lives but the welfare of their families, too, as they go through their work every day. Bill 201 would build on what we've done so far.

All around North America in the last five to 10 years there has been an increasing number of long-serving firefighters and veterans who've been unfortunately diagnosed with cancer. Mr. Chairman, the research is showing that there is a strong correlation between their job and these various cancers.

I would sincerely like to thank all the firefighters of Alberta for their service and commitment to their communities and to all of us.

I want to thank you for allowing me to share these concluding remarks, and again, Mr. Chairman, I thank all my colleagues who have spoken so eloquently to this bill from both sides of the House. I look forward to their support of Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wanting to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

[The clauses of Bill 201 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 202

Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am grateful to stand in this House in committee to speak strongly in support of Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I want to thank the hon. members of this Assembly for their thoughtful responses during second reading. To tackle a problem of this magnitude, we must all work as one to achieve our goal.

Mr. Chair, this bill will make the reporting of child pornography mandatory when someone comes across it, adding another weapon in the fight against this terrible woe. It is not a knee-jerk reaction to a dreadful problem but a measured and reasonable response that is increasingly common at the provincial level. It will take measured, deliberate, and sustained co-ordination to stamp out this problem.

As much as I want to see the proliferation of child pornography end immediately, I know it will be a process. This bill doesn't pretend to solve all the issues of child sexual exploitation, but it does reflect my approach in the past: step-by-step progress on the elimination of harm to children. As elected officials we know how complicated the legislative process can be. Even issues with a broad consensus don't lead to decisive action. Care must be taken in response.

Child pornography is a growing menace. It destroys children's lives, and it leads to a lifetime of suffering, of damaged relationships, of heartache. This is an industry, Mr. Chair, an industry with revenues in the tens of billions of dollars annually, and the sexual deviants who sexually abuse children for money or to satisfy their sick perversions are actually on the leading edge of organized crime.

I don't think there's any ambiguity about what child pornography is, but just in case any member of this Assembly is not sure, the Criminal Code of Canada is quite clear. The focus is on sexual material. There is a concern between nudity and sexuality, Mr. Chair, but the fact of the matter is that child pornography is exclusive sexual material involving acts, not poses. We are not talking about innocent family photos here, Mr. Chair. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity can rest assured that his family photo collection is safe, that his family heritage won't be left in tatters. Museums and cathedrals will not be torn down brick by brick when it becomes obligatory to report child pornography.

We are not the first province to propose this type of legislation, and we should not be the last. Albertans are reasonable people. They can see the difference between an innocent family photo and explicit pornography involving children.

Privacy is a cherished value to Albertans and an essential element of freedom and choice, but every principle has its limits. Rights are limited by their effects upon other individuals and the community. For example, sexual offenders do not have the freedom to live wherever they please. The rights of offenders in general are curtailed in terms of travel.

The only question this bill asks of Albertans is to do the right thing: report pornography material involving children and let qualified law enforcement professionals take over. This is not a scourge that we can fight alone. We must all work together. Past cases have met with not only national but international co-operation to bring these children from harm and monsters to justice.

There are great organizations in Alberta fighting this problem together. The ICE, integrated child exploitation unit, is a combined effort between the RCMP and Calgary and Edmonton police. The

child at risk response team, CARRT, is another joint effort for the protection of children. Cybertip is a national effort to curtail online exploitation of children. The federal government has been working on legislation towards increasing protection against child exploitation. In fact, Mr. Chair, they have been working on this issue since 2002. Bills C-46 and C-47 are slowly moving through the committee stage while we speak. As they are national in scope, they require the diligence to get the national execution correct. We do have a partner in Ottawa that understands the issues at stake.

We should not waste any more time. We have the power to do something at the provincial level. We should think globally, and we should act locally. Many Internet companies voluntarily forward information in regard to sites peddling child pornography. We should build on the goodwill in the broader society and take the steps that other provinces in this great country already have. This bill has the support of law enforcement and so many law-abiding Albertans. With the support of the Assembly we can make a difference in this war.

Mr. Chair, I will now table an amendment which speaks to a concern from the government on the coming into force, moving that date from July 1, 2010, to December 31, 2010. The government indicated that they could not get the regulations in place by July 1, and as a former minister of the Crown, delaying till December 31 gives the minister and their staff lots of time to get regulations in place.

The Chair: Hon. member, you have an amendment, so we'll pause and distribute the amendment.

Hon. members, this amendment is now known as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, please continue on amendment A1.

4:30

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chairman, as I noted earlier, I have been pleased to table the amendment, which speaks to the concern from the government on coming into force and moving that date from July 1, 2010, to December 31, 2010. The government indicated that they could not get the regulations in place by the 1st of July. As a former minister of the Crown, delaying till December 31 gives the minister and his staff lots of time to get the regulation in place.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll move acceptance of my amendment A1.

The Chair: On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Speaking to the amendment, I'm speaking in favour of the amendment for the various reasons that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek put forward. If the government's only concern about enacting this legislation was having sufficient time to do so, then the hon. member through this amendment has provided the government with the time to take action. In her explanation the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek pointed out that while the federal government is in the throes of putting forward legislation, it's taking an awful long time for that legislation to work its way through the system. We've had the situation of the proroguing of Parliament, which no doubt slowed down the process even further. I would like to think that Alberta is on the front lines of combatting child pornography.

Now, previously when I spoke to child pornography, I spoke about clearly identifying abusive pornographic imagery. I accept the premise that under the law such imagery – pornography, child abuse – can be identified, that there are not only federal laws but provincial laws which deal with the identification of child pornography.

Because it has such a terrible effect on children, who, obviously, are the ones being abused by adults in a position of power, with no respect for the children they're abusing, I believe that we need to move forward with this legislation.

Canada has laws where it will prosecute citizens who take their pornographic interest, desires, abuses outside the country's borders. If such laws are on the books, surely within our own country we can be more proactive in terms of legislating against pornography. Therefore, at this point I support the amendment and would look forward to speaking to the bill as amended.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity to rise to speak to this amendment. You know, I have to express appreciation to the hon. member, first, for bringing forward this legislation and for her career, which has been devoted to ensuring the protection of children in so many different ways, shapes, and forms. This is, again, just another example of her dedication. I admire and I respect the member and appreciate her bringing it forward.

I do have to say, though, Mr. Chairman, that the member recognized that the government needs time to produce the regulations, to make sure that when the legislation comes into effect, the regulations are in place for the operation of that legislation. It's critical.

But it's not just the timing to make the regulations, Mr. Chairman. Our ministers have indicated that they're working very closely with the federal government, who is planning on reintroducing some legislation that fell off the Order Paper last session. They really are concerned. They want to make sure that our legislation, our regulations will mesh with the federal legislation. As well, we have to make sure that this legislation and the regulations that would support it mesh with all of the other legislation and regulations that we have in our provincial Legislature that help ensure the safety and protection of children.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, always – always – we hear, oftentimes from the opposition members but from Albertans in general, that when we make the legislation, we do consultations. It's equally important to make sure that when we produce the regulations, we consult with those who will be impacted. There are law enforcement officers. There are lawyers. There are all sorts of systems in place that we need to consult with to ensure that this legislation is appropriate and that the regulations around it are operational so that they can still perform their duties.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the member bringing forward an amendment that changes the date from July 1 to December 31, which gives another six months, but I have some personal concern that putting a deadline on it may not allow us to do all of the consultation that's necessary because we may be forced to comply with a deadline instead of forced to get it right. No matter what, whether it's legislation or regulation, the most important thing we can do as members that represent all Albertans is to make sure we get it right the first time so we don't have to continually bring it back. I encourage all members of this House to defeat this particular amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On the amendment itself. I don't think there are too many members in this House that would dispute that this legislation is needed. I think we can derive that

from the speeches that have been given on the bill. I guess we're talking about timing here. I would say that, you know, I've read through this act. There are 11 sections in it. These are not very difficult areas to figure out the regulations for. This is not an overly complex statute. This is not an overly complex bill. We're talking about mandatory reporting for child pornography. It's pretty basic.

There is some work to do, for sure, and I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek realizes that. But, I mean, let's go back. It took this government exactly one month to adopt the recommendations for a new royalty framework and a few months thereafter to put in place the regulations, which they have since changed in the last year about six times. If we can do something like that in such a short period of time to our most important and complex industry in this province, surely we can find the time in the next eight months or nine months to do what we need to do to bring in the regulations for this very, very simple bill.

Again, for the fire code recommendations, that were alluded to in question period earlier today, it took roughly seven months to adopt the recommendations, and it took roughly the same amount of time thereafter to put those into place. Well, again, this is far, far more simple than that. Giving eight or nine months for the department, for the Solicitor General's office – it would be the Solicitor General's office, I imagine – to institute these regulations I think is more than enough time, and if they can't, then there is something wrong.

The point is that we cannot wait any longer than eight or nine months. We have got to move this file forward. The abuse is happening everywhere. The proliferation of it has increased, and there is no point in delaying this. We understand the government needs time to put the regulations in. No one is disputing that. But surely eight or nine months is enough time. I hope we can move forward with this business. We obviously need to do this. Everyone in this House seems to agree that we need to do this, so let's move forward, get it done, and have something in place by December of this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm astounded at the arguments that are being presented on the time that's needed and the appreciation. I just want to read into the record what the priorities of this government are: Bill 1, Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 2, Professional Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 3, Fatal Accidents Amendment Act; Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act; Bill 5, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act; Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act; Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 8, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act; Bill 9, Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Hinman: Just pay attention. It'll be very relevant. If it's taken you that long and you don't understand, that's the whole problem. You guys miss the whole picture day in, day out. Not only don't you act; you don't think.

Mr. Chair, Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act; Bill 11, Witness Security Act; Bill 12, Body Armour Control Act; Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act; Bill 14, Traffic Safety Amendment Act.

Here we have Bill 202, a private member's act, who's been working on this for years, Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornogra-

phy Act. This government has failed to act, and this government fails to want to recognize it now and says: we need more time.

We've known of this problem for years. To put it off, to say that they can't in nine months get the regulations in place is appalling. It's shameful to the people of Alberta, but more shameful is that kids are going to suffer the consequences because we failed to act here in this House. It's unacceptable. We need to move on it. We know this is happening. It's not a question of: "Oh, is this something that's going to come up in the future? Is there going to be, you know, a new fire started?" Mr. Chair, we need to take this amendment. This is being gracious. This should have been Bill 1 for this government, not a private member's bill.

The purpose of government is to protect our life, our liberty, and our property. The purpose of our justice system is to ensure that we protect those who can't protect themselves. That's what we're doing as a society. We want to protect our most vulnerable. We want to protect our children from these horrible individuals that perpetrate these crimes that destroy their lives going forward. What could be more important than this, than to refocus this government and get this bill passed?

It's unacceptable for this government to vote against this and say: we can't do it in nine months. We could go on for 50 minutes on the things that they can seem to do and the damage they want to cause. Let's do something that's good, that's going to look out for our children in the future, and send a loud and clear message that we're going to do something.

Every level of government should be working together to get something done and not every level pointing to the other one, using excuses: well, we can't do it; you don't understand. No, I do not understand. Especially, those poor little children that are getting abused will never understand. We need to do something. We need to pass this. To use excuses: we need more time; we need to consult. What? We're going to consult with those little ones to see the impact? We know, Mr. Chairman. We need to do something. We need to do something today and not delay.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I had to think about what I was going to say for a few minutes. I appreciate the Member for Battle River-Wainwright's comments. I'm quite taken aback.

One of the things about Bill 202, Mr. Chair, if I may tell you, is that it's a bill that I actually have been working on for a year, and it was a bill that I was working on when I was a government member. It was a bill that I sat down with with the former Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice, who both said that they supported this particular bill.

I have in my hot little hand, Mr. Chair, a briefing note that happened to come from the government when I brought this piece of legislation forward. At no time – at no time – under the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks on this piece of legislation is it ever mentioned about the regulations. What it does say is that it will enhance the protection of children from sexual exploitation, thereby contributing to ensuring safer communities. The bill could increase the discovery and apprehension of predators.

Weaknesses. It says that it could increase the number of reports made to local authorities, who are limited in what they can do if the materials were not created locally. It would create the burden of a number of unnecessary reports that are made to local authorities.

Opportunities, Mr. Chair. The bill could demonstrate the government's commitment to protecting children. The bill could ensure that Alberta is a leader in child protection. Then it goes on to some issues about some risks in regard to it could be constitutionally challenged.

Well, I've been a member of this House since 1993. I brought a very innovative piece of legislation through this Assembly called the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. The Premier of the day knew that it could be constitutionally challenged and supported having it constitutionally challenged because it was protecting our children in this province.

Mr. Chair, I understand that the July 1 date on the original Bill 202 might have pushed the limit for the department. I accepted and thought about extending it to December 31. I would be more than willing to help the government through the regulations. I would be more than willing to talk to the stakeholders in the community.

I want to reiterate, though, Mr. Chairman, that the stakeholders in the community support this piece of legislation. I have never brought forward a piece of legislation since I have been here, since 1993, without consulting with the people that the particular bill would affect. That's why the private members' bills that I've brought forward in this Legislature have been successful in this Legislature. I work from the bottom up, not the top down. That is why the people in this province have supported the private bills that I have brought forward in this Legislature: the Drug-endangered Children Act, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, the drug-endangered children apprehension act, Amber Alert. All of those have come forward because the stakeholders in this province have been consulted. Bill 202 has been consulted with the stakeholders.

We're giving the opportunity to bring this innovative piece of legislation forward to this government, asking them to accept it. I spoke to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. He explained that the government wasn't and couldn't do the regulations by July 1. I said, "No problem; we'll give them till the 31st of December," which is already – what? – eight or nine months. How many other children are going to be affected while we wait eight or nine months more?

I've been working with Cybertip. Manitoba has this legislation. Ontario has this legislation. While some of them have not been proclaimed, they have also done a lot of work. I've also worked with those provinces that have brought this piece of legislation forward.

I would like to ask every member of this Assembly to support the amendment that we've put on the table.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to stand up and support this amendment. I'm sorry that I have to support this amendment. I'm sorry that the government has not done anything on this when they've known for a year that this Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been working on it. Surely to heavens this government has been aware of this problem for the last 20 years. This isn't something that cropped up last year; this is something that's been around for 20 years. The fact that we wouldn't be able to move quicker I think really is appalling.

So I am supporting it. I'm, as I say, disappointed that we have to wait this long, but if something will happen, then, yes, it's a good amendment.

The Chair: Is there any other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:49 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Pastoor
Chase	Hinman	

5:00

Against the motion:

Ady	Jablonski	Rodney
Benito	Johnston	Sandhu
Bhullar	Leskiw	Sarich
Blackett	Lindsay	Sherman
Doerksen	McFarland	VanderBurg
Goudreau	Olson	Vandermeer
Griffiths	Quest	Weadick
Groeneveld	Renner	Woo-Paw
Horne		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 25
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 201 and progress on Bill 202.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 201. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 202. 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.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Those hon. members concurring in the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Cultural Competency in Government

505. Ms Woo-Paw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans to further the government's goals for equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans.

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

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour to rise in the Legislature today and open debate on Motion 505. Alberta has always been a province of great cultural diversity, started first by over 50 First Nations groups, followed by the many pioneering communities, to the recent waves and diverse sources of immigrants. Our province has benefited from having this diversity of people socially, culturally, economically, and politically in the development of this great province. We've benefited from the rich array of experiences, skills, and perspectives these people brought as well as their unwavering determination to overcome the hurdles to their shared desire to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta encompasses 47 First Nations, 134 reserves, three treaty areas, eight Métis settlements, and is now home to one of the largest, youngest, and fastest growing population of aboriginal people in Canada. There are three distinct peoples with distinct histories, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs amongst the 250,000 here in Alberta.

Our province has also experienced a lengthy period of dramatic population growth. While much of that growth has resulted from migration within Canada, the number of immigrants choosing Alberta as a new home has also risen dramatically. According to the 2006 census 16.3 per cent of Alberta's population, about 550,000 people, were immigrants to Canada. Between 2001 and 2006 Alberta's immigrant population increased by 20.2 per cent. According to Statistics Canada this was more than two times higher than the growth of the Canadian-born population, which grew by 8.7 per cent during the same period. The major sources of immigration to Alberta are Asia and the Middle East, followed by Europe and Africa.

Mr. Speaker, as the social fabric of our society evolves, so must our institutions. When population diversity continues to increase rapidly, the capacity of organizations to reflect and respond to these changes must also keep pace. Public institutions need the tools and resources to become more responsive to diversity as they propose law and policy and deliver programs and services. In the coming decade it will be increasingly important that the government implement cultural competency as a core business requirement for effective governance and service to the public.

Motion 505 addresses the government of Alberta's goals around supporting immigration as a means to attract and retain the skilled and knowledgeable workforce necessary for continued economic growth and prosperity in the province. It recognizes that continued effort will be required to ensure that government organizations are able to respond to and leverage our increasing diversity by government employees who bring global experiences and approaches to the workplace; developing work environments that embrace employees' differences and meaningfully use their attributes to enhance the performance of the government; developing government law, policy, and programs that respect and accommodate Albertans' diverse perspectives and traditions; and delivering programs and services to Albertans in ways that acknowledge and respond in new ways to the diverse needs and traditions found in different communities.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 505 is also developed against the backdrop of our government's policy framework on supporting immigrants and immigration to Alberta. This framework was developed in 2005 in order to lay out a more integrated and concerted approach to attracting and retaining immigrants. The framework recognizes that immigrants are vital to sustaining the prosperity and continued development of Alberta's economy now and in the future.

This framework incorporates four key strategic directions for government action: building welcoming communities where immigrants have the opportunity to participate fully in social, cultural, and economic life; attracting increasing numbers of immigrants to Alberta; expanding programs and services to support immigrant integration; and helping immigrants access labour market opportunities. This progressive policy framework recognizes the need for co-ordinated policy and program responses from a number of ministries as immigration issues are interlinked with human resources, settlement services, education, health, economic development, and housing.

The purpose of Motion 505 is to strengthen the ability of ministries of the Alberta government to better include and serve an increasingly diverse citizenry. Government organizations are urged to assess their current level of cultural competency so that we know where our strengths are and where we need to develop plans and strategies to address shortcomings, to share their best practices so there is continued learning throughout this process, and to incorporate evolving approaches to cultural competency into their planning and operations in order to sustain their efforts in development.

Mr. Speaker, cultural competency is the ability to function effectively in cross-cultural situations. It enables people to interact with others with diverse cultural values, beliefs, customs, and practices with respect, appreciation, and effectiveness. Within an organization is the capacity of that organization to work effectively with culturally diverse populations by integrating cultural diversity into all aspects of the organization's values, structures, policies, and practices.

Mr. Speaker, a culturally competent organization is one that recognizes people's culture as an integral part of his or her well-being and that demonstrates openness and acceptance of differences. Employees in such organizations feel that their culture is understood and respected, that their world views and different life experiences are seen as adding value to the performance of the unit or organization. Other characteristics of a culturally competent organization are the acknowledgement of cultural diversity in the community and an organization's ability and commitment to collaborate with culturally diverse individuals, groups and organizations; utilize cultural expertise among community leaders and elders in planning and delivering services; and having its organizational roles and services understood and respected in the community.

5:10

An example of this is the recent Inspiring Education dialogue with Albertans on the future of public education. The committee included membership that reflected the cultural diversity of the population. Hence, some culturally specific sessions were made possible so that the voices and perspectives of diverse groups were included in this very important visioning process. If this type of inclusive practice is incorporated into the regular process of the ministry in future engagement, then inclusion of diverse groups will be a sustained, regular effort rather than sporadic or by chance.

Mr. Speaker, culturally competent organizations also possess the capacity to identify and remove barriers preventing culturally diverse people from having access to services. These organizations develop outreach strategies to ensure participation by culturally diverse people and provide culturally appropriate methods of service delivery, and cultural diversity is incorporated in all aspects of service delivery from assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation.

Many of our ministries and departments have made great efforts to develop culturally sensitive and multilingual information materials, whether these are information on children's services,

housing, family violence, or health services, just to name a few. These efforts would be even more effective if we had stronger working relationships with our growing diverse communities so that we would have greater understanding of the barriers people experience in accessing this good information, which perpetuates a lack of access to needed services and support. Stronger and more meaningful working relationships with our communities would enable our government to develop even more effective outreach strategies. Maybe the best places to leave our brochures are the various community gathering places such as places of worship, restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, and where people do their laundry.

Mr. Speaker, the development of cultural competency affects both internal organizational culture and practices and external relations and service delivery of our government. Implementation of cultural competency in the ministries of the government can bring positive results for government in both areas. Our government will improve lines of communication with our growing communities, enjoy a higher retention rate of our newcomers in the province, as well as have the talents, skills, and potential of all employees of the government more fully used to achieve government objectives. More satisfied and loyal employees in government ministries will give us greater retention of skilled workers in a competitive market.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 505 is about strengthening our government's capacity with comprehensive cultural competency development in order to achieve our stated goals and policies of ensuring equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to rise to speak to Motion 505, cultural competency development, brought forth by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Cultural competency is a set of behaviours added to some policies and procedures that enable institutions and organizations to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities. Motion 505 urges the government of Alberta to evaluate their current level of cultural competence to find new ways to better represent Alberta's diverse population. I believe that this is extremely important to strengthen cultural competency and understand the day-to-day planning and operations of an organization.

Mr. Speaker, as the daughter of a Ukrainian immigrant Motion 505 hits close to home. I saw how my parents were treated in the workforce, and standing here today, I know we've come a very, very long way. We have developed many commendable programs that seek to grant all Albertans equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and the opportunity to receive a higher quality of life. However, I know that more progress can be made in creating a more inclusive approach to cultural competency in government services, workplaces, and communities.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency that comprises many different people from many different backgrounds and cultures. Two of the most prominent ones in our area are the French and the Ukrainians. With the oil sands being one of the most profitable industries in my community, we have many foreign and transient workers who live there. My constituents would benefit greatly from improving how we serve diverse cultural communities.

The major priority of this government is to support immigration by attracting and retaining a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. By having culturally appropriate government services as an incentive to retaining newcomers in the province, we can make them feel more at home. Government will then have the capacity and the reputation to attract employees from immigrant communities that

were not previously recruited, immigrants with a wealth of knowledge that in the past have made this province what it is today.

As a former teacher I believe it all comes down to how we educate our students and staff. In fact, when I applied for my first teaching job, I felt I was discriminated against because I was Ukrainian. This hurt a great deal, but I did not let it stop me from becoming a teacher. I am thankful for the positive developments we have made over the years to prevent discrimination in the workplace from occurring, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay for initiating debate on this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta can be a leader in improving cultural competency in this province, and it must start in our own offices and programs. As our population grows, it becomes more diverse. We have not always kept pace with reflecting and responding to these changes. I believe that Motion 505 could be the first step towards strengthening the connection between different cultures and communities. I support this motion, and I look forward to the remainder of the discussion this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to speak to this Motion 505, and I want to acknowledge the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay in bringing this motion forward. I think it's a very worthwhile debate. Just by virtue of the consciousness raising that happens when a motion like this gets discussed, I think she should be congratulated.

The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans to further the government's goals for equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans.

It's probably tempting for people, for all of us and, I know, even myself when I saw this motion, to think about immigrants. One right away goes to thinking about people who come from other countries to make a new life for themselves and their families, the struggles and the barriers that they run into as they start out that process, and for good reason. Probably most of us are either children or descendants of immigrants or even, actually, immigrants. I think we probably all have our stories to tell from our own families, the kinds of challenges that they faced coming from another world, so to speak, with a new language, new customs, and so on. They all overcame those barriers and hardships, and Canada is known for that. In fact, it's a uniquely Canadian thing that people came from many different backgrounds and have become part of a country that has welcomed them all.

I had the great opportunity a week or so ago to be part of a lunch with the new Italian ambassador. I was very interested to hear him talk about some of the people he has met of Italian descent in Canada who have managed to be very successful here. They have completely embraced Canadian life, Canadian customs and traditions, yet they've also been extremely successful in preserving their own culture. Again, he described that as a uniquely Canadian trait.

We do live in a multicultural society. It's increasingly diverse. We also have an expanding economy, so we need immigrants. We need skilled people to come from other parts of the world and adopt Canada as their new home. But what about those people who don't come from somewhere else? What about the people who were born here and face the same kinds of barriers that immigrants from other parts of the world face? Of course, I'm talking about our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

5:20

I've had the opportunity in the last year and a half to visit a lot of aboriginal communities, and this issue has become something that I've become very interested in. The reason for my visits is that I'm on a committee that's focused on the participation of aboriginal people in our economy and in our workforce. It's been said that up to 80 per cent of people in some aboriginal communities are unemployed. This is a very complex problem. It has many, many challenges. Among the foremost challenges are education – actually, that was already referred to by the hon. member who led off the debate here – housing, transportation. Many other issues also come into play: child care and so on. But in my discussions with leaders and people from these communities racism comes up a lot. Unfortunately, that's still an issue that aboriginal people are having to deal with in our communities.

This is the youngest, fastest growing population in Alberta, aboriginal people. They are a huge, untapped natural resource, both for themselves and for all Albertans. It's very important for our government to provide services not just to aboriginal people but to all people, no matter where they come from, in a way that is respectful and is sensitive to their particular needs.

Now, our government has done a lot of good work in this area, and one could take quite a bit of time in debate here listing off the various initiatives that various government departments have undertaken, but I won't do that. I'll just say that the motion here really is supportive of those many initiatives, and I very much support the motion for that reason.

There may be some who would say that the motion has the feel of being more involved in institutional navel gazing or that maybe it's going to be something that is going to have cost implications that could be prohibitive. I would just say that my mother always said that it doesn't take any more time or money to be nice to somebody and to be sensitive, and I think that's really what we're talking about here. It's just a raising of consciousness, really, to have our government departments act in this uniquely Canadian way, which respects people no matter what background they come from. That has to be based on an awareness of what their particular challenges and issues are.

I think that our government is leading the way. I would just say that this motion further supports that direction, and for that reason I'm very supportive of this motion. Again, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but might I have your permission to introduce some very special visitors to the Assembly this afternoon?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: In the Speaker's gallery are representatives of a number of agricultural societies that happen to exist north of Edmonton. We have representatives from the Barrhead Exhibition Association and Agricultural Society; the Pibroch & District Agricultural Society; PACO, the Progressive Agricultural Community Organization; Clyde & District Agricultural Society; Fort Assiniboine Agricultural Society; M.T.M. Agricultural Society; Westlock & District Agricultural Society; Morinville and District Agricultural Society; Highridge and District Agricultural Society; and Linaria & District Agricultural Society. These are all agricul-

tural societies within the constituency that I have the honour of representing. I'd ask them all to rise. Would you give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Cultural Competency in Government

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to talk on Motion 505, which is sponsored by the MLA from Calgary-Mackay. Cultural competency can be defined as a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution or organization to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities. Alberta has become an increasingly important destination for skilled immigrant workers in Canada and in my riding of West Yellowhead.

I want to talk particularly about Jasper national park. This is a region which attracts visitors from all over the world and, because of that, has also attracted many skilled immigrants on an annual basis who come and work in the hospitality and tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, culturally competent businesses have been able to attract and retain skilled immigrants, which has been an advantage in a tight labour market, especially in Jasper. Businesses in Jasper have attracted, supported, and promoted a diverse pool of employees who bring global experiences and approaches to the workplace. Many workplaces in Jasper have developed work environments that embrace employees' differences and meaningful user attributes to enhance the performance of their business.

Motion 505 promotes further cultural competency in the ministries of the Alberta government, and I think that's a positive step. As illustrated in Jasper, cultural competency can create connections to new communities through outreach and consultation. Cultural competency in government improves relations with cultural communities through the provision of services that recognize and respond to cultural differences.

New Canadians, Mr. Speaker, see a culturally competent government as respectful and helpful. Cultural competency improves lines of communication between government and diverse communities. Social programs are more effective when services are better able to address the real needs of the diverse clients that they serve. Culturally appropriate government services serve as an incentive to retain newcomers in this province. A culturally competent government provides a positive international image of Alberta as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants, which is important to Alberta's long-term economic growth.

Employment and Immigration has been working with industry stakeholders to support implementation of industry-led workforce strategies specific to each sector. Many of these actions support employers in creating welcoming workplaces and building on the talents of a diverse workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the world has become a small place, and it is important to all of us to understand and welcome all who come to this great province. It is through them that we will continue to grow and be the province that we are today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my privilege to rise today and speak to Motion 505, and I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing this motion forward. I want to highlight a few aspects of this motion and also, first of all,

point out the fact that this is a motion and that, as such, it raises an issue for us to discuss and urges the government to take some action. In that regard I think the matter of raising this issue as important to our government, as important to our society, is extremely important.

There are three things that this motion basically talks about. It urges the government and its ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their ongoing activities. I think that's important, and as the Member for West Yellowhead talked about the definition or a possible definition of cultural competency, I want to repeat that because I think it's also significant in terms of what's important about this motion. Cultural competency can be defined as a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution or organization to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, that's us, that's Alberta, that's Canada, and will be on an ongoing basis. When I look around this room, whether it's on the floor or the people observing this discussion this afternoon, we've all come from somewhere. We've all chosen to make Alberta our home. We've come here to work, to live, to play, to raise our families, and that's important.

I think the matter of the definition of cultural competency is important to this motion. If it was a bill, we would have to spend a lot more time clearly defining what we meant, but I think that basically what this definition means is that we're going to work together, we're going to communicate with each other, we're going to understand each other, and at the end of the day we're going to push ourselves to the middle. This isn't about each of us standing off in our corner and highlighting our own cultural uniqueness. It is about celebrating what is unique about each of us, but it's also about celebrating what we want to do together as Albertans and as Canadians. I think on that basis this is an important initiative, and I appreciate the fact that the Member for Calgary-Mackay asked me to speak on it.

5:30

My constituency of Strathmore-Brooks, as likely every member in this House could say, is certainly a culturally diverse community and one that has been that for many, many years but has seen that that's ongoing because of the aspects of industry that happen in our community. Certainly, Lakeside Packers, which has been a large beef packing operation in the Brooks community for many years, has drawn a broad range of people from diverse cultural backgrounds to work and live in the community. I say that carefully because that business has been a draw but only an entry point into the community for many people, as are all of the businesses. The cultural diversity of our community has expanded dramatically.

I think this bill really allows us to highlight some of the things we already do well and urges us to continue to do them well. There are many initiatives in the Brooks community that deal specifically with the fact that a relatively high percentage of our population has English as a second language. When I look across this floor, I expect that many of us would say the same and have either ourselves or parents who learned English as a second language.

That's one of the services in the Brooks area that's extremely important and, I think, speaks to one of the challenges, one of the things that's important about being competent culturally. It's extremely important that new immigrants, people who come to this province, come to this country, are able to communicate. The initiative to provide resources to assist people in becoming compe-

tent in the English language, I think, is a very proactive and important thing and one of the services that is provided through a range of services in the Brooks community. The public library has become an important entry point for a range of community services that assist immigrants in the Brooks community.

I think one of the other things that highlights the importance of competency in this area is the fact that, as people come to this country from a range of different backgrounds and other countries, we celebrate democracy in this country. We celebrate freedom. We celebrate the supportive authority that we have through our police commissions, through the police services in this country. But one of the things that I've noticed in Brooks and has been raised with me also in discussions is the fact that not everyone has that understanding.

One of the things that's important is helping communities – and by communities I mean groups of people who may have come from other countries – to understand what it means to be free, what it means to have confidence in police authorities. I can only speak as someone who takes that for granted, but not everyone can. I think some of that kind of reality is why it's important for us to be competent in integrating people into our society.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this is very much about pushing ourselves to the middle because it's also about encouraging new immigrants into this province and into this country to be aggressive about integrating into Canadian society. Everyone who comes here from somewhere else has something to offer in terms of cultural diversity and an opportunity to better understand what freedom and what democracy mean in this country, what an opportunity there is to work and to work in order to support one's family, whether that's here in Alberta, here in Canada, or the support that for many immigrants also goes back to their homeland to allow families to flourish over there.

The whole matter of cultural competence, I think, is important. I think what I like about this motion is that it raises the issue. It allows us to celebrate diversity, celebrate the things that make our communities strong but also make our economy strong because we recognize that every year we'll have additional people coming to this country who choose to make Alberta home. I think that's one of the things that is similar about all of us, and it's important that we keep pushing each other to the middle in that. It's not about sitting off to the side and being isolated. It's about working together.

For all of those reasons I support the initiative, the spirit of this motion and thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing it forward.

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

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Motion 505 as it deals with cultural sensitivity and support. I'm not going to go too far back in history, but the reality is that in one of the last ice ages, basically, the first people crossed the Bering Strait and became the inhabitants of this nation. They were the first line of immigrants, as far as I'm concerned. We don't have a whole lot of fossil evidence of individuals being here before, but everyone who has come since is basically an immigrant, and some have adjusted better than others. I think it's an extremely important role of this government to assist with cultural accommodation. It's very important that people's customs and cultures, that are part of adding to the Canadian fabric, be honoured and supported, and of course we would like to think that any kinds of warring or negative interaction is left behind in the country of origin. For a lot of reasons that's why people immigrate to Canada, for the safety factor and the economic opportunity.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the Minister of Education is considerably more excited about a recent memorandum of understanding that has been shared with Chuck Strahl, the federal minister of aboriginal affairs, and with the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8, who were introduced earlier in this Assembly. When I had an opportunity to talk about that memorandum of understanding with the minister and Carolyn Buffalo, who is the chief of the Montana First Nation, which is the smallest nation operating out of Hobbema, there was concern about the speed at which culturally sensitive agreements are made. The minister didn't seem to be at all worried that this was kind of slow moving.

While it was a positive target, it seemed to be going very slowly. I, on the other hand, have concerns because, for example, we had back in 2000, 2001 an aboriginal policy initiative, and there were some very significant members of First Nations and Métis settlements involved in that particular policy. Well, flash forward nine years, 10 years, and here we are at the beginning of a memorandum of understanding that will, amongst other things, create a cultural centre, which will then develop educational policies, which will then produce improvements in terms of aboriginal students moving forward not only culturally but through the education system.

5:40

Now, contrast that principle with the reality of what happened with the Northland school division, where in a very paternalistic, patriarchal way the whole board of First Nations elected officials was disbanded. A person who had previously been in charge – I believe the gentleman's name was Colin Kelly – was sort of given the job, along with three appointed individuals, of trying to improve the educational participation rate of First Nations students. I see this just personally as an extension of – basically, one individual was a representative. He was a First Nations adviser to the minister of aboriginal affairs in B.C., so he had a degree of First Nations background and legitimacy. But I frequently see us not getting past involving First Nations directly in moving forward.

I've talked a lot about First Nations, but I see English as a second language students, who I had the privilege of teaching over a 34-year period, as being in a similar circumstance of isolation, educationally speaking. I'm hoping that Motion 505 is going to address this. Only 52 per cent of First Nations students graduate within a five-year period of entering high school. In terms of English as a second language students we had dropout rates of up to 75 per cent. So it's absolutely essential that when we encourage individuals to participate in the Canadian fabric, we arm them with every possibility to do so.

In the case of successful circumstances such as the turnaround at Hobbema, it was involvement of the children in culturally sensitive programs. Carolyn Buffalo, for example, indicated that there are Cree language specialists and there are Cree cultural specialists that are part of the successful programs operating out of Hobbema. A very successful program is operating out of the Stoney First Nation on the Morley reserve, where children's cultural sensitivities are being embraced, and it's part of the program. As a result, we see the school being crowded to the point that additions will have to be made. That's a statement of success.

For our ESL students to be successful, they need to have more time and more support to learn the English language, and we should not be expecting them, early on in their English as a second language process, to be tested at the grade 3, 6, 9, and again at the 12 levels with standardized achievement tests that are heavily language and culture based. If we're going to provide the support for, first, the children of immigrants because we know that it's easier to learn a language as a child, we have to then move toward supporting the families.

Now, this government has cut back the funding when it comes to First Nations. The government has frozen the funding for ESL, English as a second language, instruction, so we're going in the wrong direction. We've seen, for example, in the Justice department a cutback on First Nations probation officers. We've seen a cutback in FNMI funding in the Education ministry. If we're going to be culturally sensitive and take it a step further to be culturally supportive, then we have to set timelines. We have to go beyond the discussions. While you can't ask for funding in a private member's motion or private member's bill, we can at least have timelines and check-offs knowing that we've been successful. An example of one of the programs the government provided funding for was to help with the Sudanese community: \$85,000 as part of the crime and communities task force was provided to the Sudanese community to help integrate their youth to a greater extent. It's programs like that that have budgets attached and timelines that are absolutely essential to welcoming individuals.

The government also cut back in terms of bringing foreign doctors into our service. They cut back the number of training spots from 60 to 40. If we're going to embrace the world and provide opportunities, whether it's the temporary foreign workers whose rights have been squashed, whether it's adding the 12 cents to the minimum wage where so many first immigrants experience employment, we need to be doing better in this province. We need to be speeding up the nominee process as opposed to just looking at temporary foreign workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise and speak to Motion 505 on cultural competency and development as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Motion 505 urges this government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competence, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been and continues to be a province built by immigrants. Alberta has been a land of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from around the world, myself included. While we may come from many nations and backgrounds, we are all bound by common values, values such as freedom and democracy, a positive and can-do spirit, love for our friends, family, and our fellow citizens, and a belief that if you work hard, you can achieve your dreams.

As an immigrant myself, I recognize the good intentions of this motion. After all, our country is stronger when we share our culture and heritage with our fellow Canadians. However, in return for this acceptance I also feel that it is the obligation and the responsibility of immigrants to learn the language, the culture, the business practices of their new country and share their cultures with fellow Canadians. I always say that Canada is not my country of birth; it is my country of choice.

For myself, when I came to this country, I studied in order to be a better businessman. I chose to go to NAIT while I was still running my business to study all the courses offered in NAIT's business program, and I studied economics at the University of Alberta to learn how business is conducted in this country. That education enabled me to become a better businessman, a better entrepreneur, a better Canadian employer.

A side story, Mr. Speaker. When the election was called, all of a sudden I got a phone call from a former employee. You know, I hadn't encountered her for many years, but she wanted to become a volunteer in my campaign. She told me it was because she really enjoyed the years that she worked for me.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this system has been working very well for Canadians. Through hard work and strong education there is nothing an immigrant to this great country cannot achieve. The goal of the government should be to ensure that all Albertans have the tools to succeed in an environment of cultural understanding and tolerance. Essentially, this means an inclusive attitude that empowers those of all backgrounds. This is particularly important because of the great diversity of our country.

5:50

Government has implemented many policies that provide all Albertans an equal opportunity to succeed and to achieve their dreams. The Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act protects Albertans from discrimination and helps to ensure that we all have an equal opportunity to earn a living, find a place to live, and enjoy public services. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act promote cultural understanding and equality. In Alberta our government continues to work to ensure that diversity and understanding are reflected in the workplace.

The Ministry of Employment and Immigration has led the development of a comprehensive labour force strategy called building and educating tomorrow's workforce. This strategy and other initiatives in our government are helping to support employers in creating welcoming workplaces and building the talents of a diverse workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to live by the principles of inclusiveness. My constituency of Edmonton-McClung is a home to Edmonton's largest Jewish community as well as strong Russian, Ukrainian, Muslim, Turkish, and Asian communities. Before and after the election I spent 13 months knocking on over 18,000 doors, talking to people from door to door, talking to those with different cultures and different backgrounds. This experience has helped me to be an effective representative for my constituents. I simply asked those who I had the opportunity to meet to vote for me if they believed that I would do a better job of serving them as their elected representative.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the intention of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mackay. However, I feel that our government is already making significant progress on a number of initiatives that are working to ensure tolerance and cultural understanding in the workplace. I feel that a government should work to promote policies inclusive of all Albertans. Furthermore, I believe there are many opportunities outside of government for Albertans to promote cultural understanding and tolerance.

Myself, Mr. Speaker, I have been doing this since the mid-90s. Every year I help finance and organize multicultural events. Very recently, last November, I had 3,000 people in the Jubilee Auditorium. We had more than 400 performers on stage. They came from 20 different cultural backgrounds. That's the way to promote cultural understanding, to share our values, to share our differences.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to work to foster cultural understanding and tolerance in our province while remaining mindful of the common values that bind us as Canadians.

Before I end my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell a story. I had a conversation with a group of Sikh people today that had been introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I talked to this gentleman very frankly. I told him I'm going to speak against this motion. I explained my reasons. Do you know what he told me? The gentleman, Savi Kachroo – and he even put his telephone number here – said he totally supports what I am trying to say. Because we came to this country, we have every obligation to make this country a better place by integrating with mainstream society.

And he said: you as legislators should take a balanced approach; you should stay on a higher attitude to make sure that all Albertans, all Canadians are being treated fairly, equally.

Mr. Speaker, I know this is a very sensitive issue and a very emotional issue because I myself have gone through so much. I'm not saying this world is perfect. People say, "David, you should be very proud. You have been very successful in business. Now you are successful in politics." I say, "Yes. I am very proud of what I have achieved, but I'm more proud what I've overcome." There are a lot of issues we need to deal with. There are a lot of difficulties we need to overcome. But for the reasons I just talked about, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting Motion 505.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, do you wish to briefly comment?

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'll be very, very brief. I just want to say thank you to all my hon. colleagues who spoke to this motion. I really appreciate the level of interest and vigour demonstrated through your debate. You spoke with great insights, and you spoke from your hearts, and I appreciate it.

I don't have time to respond to all these great comments. I just want to end by addressing to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to emphasize what integration really means. The most democratic and equitable type of integration is the type that is a two-way street, where we come together in the middle, respecting each other's differences and building, actually, our unity through the recognition of our diversity and differences. I really appreciate your point. I appreciate all of my colleagues' points.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. members wishing to speak, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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