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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our citizens. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a great pleasure it is to rise today in order to introduce to you some very special guests who are here from Blessed Kateri school in the riding of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Accompanying them today are their teachers, Joel Piché, Ray Brooks, and Ms Darlene Payne. There are 61 visitors altogether, three classes. I would ask all of them to now please rise, and let us greet them with some warm applause.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 54 grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Natalie Gago-Esteves, Matthew Thiessen, and teacher assistant Cindy Lee. I had an opportunity to meet with the students earlier, and they asked very tough questions, perhaps even tougher than those asked in question period. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you on behalf of myself and the honourable and generous Minister of Transportation a group of very hard-working and forward-thinking municipal representatives from central Alberta. They are here representing the South Red Deer Regional Wastewater Commission as well as the Mountain View regional water system and are seated in the members' gallery. They are Warren Smith, councillor for Olds; Julia King, mayor of the town of Penhold; Judy Dahl, mayor of the town of Olds; Al Kemmere, reeve of Mountain View county; Cody Berggren, mayor of the town of Bowden; Patt Churchill, councillor for the town of Innisfail; and Dennis Cooper, councillor for the town of Penhold. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three ladies from the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens. Over the past two years I've been fairly involved with this organiza-

tion and have learned first-hand of the great work that they are doing for young moms in need. I'll be speaking more about Terra in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would ask these ladies as I say their names to rise to receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly: Ms Erica Pitre, grade 11; Ms Mellisa Johnson, grade 12; and Ms Laura Slomp Booy, the youth leadership facilitator. They are standing, so let's give them a little greeting.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Gurpreet Gill from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, who is here to observe the question period today. He had the opportunity to meet several of my colleagues earlier this afternoon, and I hope he enjoyed it. At this time I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional 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 today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the media from my constituency who have come to take in the sights and sounds of our Assembly and to meet with the Premier. From the *Athabasca Advocate* I'm pleased to introduce Ross Hunter, Lauren Den Hartog, Chris Cain; from the River radio station Chris Byrne; and from the *Smoky Lake Signal* Nathan Taylor. If there is anything you need to know about our constituency of Athabasca-Redwater, these are certainly the folks who know it. I'd now like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special people, Gary Sampley and Laura Jurasek. Gary is executive director of the Edmonton Epilepsy Association, and Laura has just been named president of that body. Laura has been a special blessing to my family in her role as a dedicated nurse practitioner at the Stollery children's hospital in the pediatric neurology ward. They're here today to help raise awareness for epilepsy, which I'll talk about in my member's statement. Having a child with epilepsy can be hard at times, and I want to sincerely thank Laura, Gary, and all those involved with the Stollery children's hospital and the Edmonton Epilepsy Association and ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three people from the Mosquito Creek Foundation in Nanton. They are part of the volunteer board overseeing the operation of our local seniors' lodge and two self-contained housing entities. In the past few years this group has gone above and beyond their respective duties. When the local medical clinic was offered for sale, they set about fundraising and bought the clinic as well as the house next door for future expansion. They then stepped up and borrowed to partner with the province to build a 30-bed designated assisted living facility onto the lodge, repatriating individuals who were living away from their friends and family.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names: Lynne Foden, chief administrative officer; Leigh McNeill, board chair; and Rick Rogers, vice chair. I'll now ask the House to recognize with a

thunderous applause the contributions that these people make to our seniors.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two outstanding citizens of Red Deer, Mayor Morris Flewwelling and, accompanying him, the director of development services, Paul Goranson. They are in the Legislature today as part of their visit to Edmonton to meet with various government officials. Mayor Flewwelling has served the citizens of Red Deer on city council and as mayor for over 25 years. In addition to this, in 1997 he received the Order of Canada, Canada's highest civilian decoration, for his distinguished volunteer service and leadership of national significance in heritage preservation. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North and myself have been fortunate to work with these gentlemen over the years, and I'm honoured to introduce them in the Assembly today. They're in the public gallery, and I will now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

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

Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to talk a little bit more about the organization that I just introduced, the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens. Since 1971 Terra has provided programs and services to help pregnant and parenting teens gain confidence and develop the skills required to raise healthy and happy babies.

Terra supports approximately 600 clients and their children in the Edmonton area each year with a staff of more than 60 people in three different locations. They offer 12 programs, which include individual counselling, home visitation, parenting support, group activities, services for dads, clothing exchange, childhood development activities, prenatal classes, housing support, and a child care centre at the Braemar school.

Last fall I helped Terra raise some 120,000 diapers for their Baby Heroes campaign. Along with the support of many others in the community our contribution to their campaign gave some 120,000 diapers to mothers in need.

Terra is just an incredible organization that helps young parents return to school, make career plans, have healthier relationships, and helps with the community supports that they need. I would like to thank the organization, especially the young ladies who are here today, for the tremendous work that they are doing in supporting their cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40 International Purple Day

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately seven years ago I awoke in the middle of the night to my wife's screams for help. I found her leaning over our infant son, who, to my shock, was in full convulsions, eyes rolling back in his head. It was terrifying. As a parent at that point you'd give anything to access the best treatment and the most dedicated health care professionals in the world, and I'm glad to say that, thankfully, that's what we have here in Alberta.

Epilepsy is characterized by a number of recurrent and unprovoked seizures that can occur at any age, as was the case in my family. Mr. Speaker, this Friday, March 26, is International Purple Day, which caps off March as Epilepsy Awareness Month in Canada. Purple Day was founded in 2008 by then nine-year-old Cassidy Megan of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The name for Purple Day was taken from epilepsy's internationally recognized colour, lavender. Purple Day was established to increase awareness about epilepsy and has succeeded in a short time. It launched internationally in 2009, and now there are 15 countries world-wide participating in 2010 Purple Day activities. Epilepsy affects 50 million people world-wide and 40,000 here in Alberta. One of the major initiatives that Purple Day seeks to achieve is to demystify epilepsy and seizures in general. They occur when the normal electrical balance in the brain is lost, with cells either firing when they shouldn't or not firing when they should.

I know I have acknowledged their presence here today already, but I want to thank all of the truly amazing staff at the Stollery children's hospital and the people at the Edmonton Epilepsy Association for all their dedication and help and support.

For more information please visit the Purple Day website at www.purpleday.org. I urge my colleagues to wear purple this Friday in support of this great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REAP Calgary

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, several days ago I had the pleasure of attending the REAP sustainability breakfast. REAP stands for Respect for the Earth and All People. It's a collection of 20 Calgary businesses that are working toward a more sustainable Alberta. The breakfast was held at Green City Motors, a very cool business that specializes in electric bikes and scooters. REAP encourages citizens to shop locally for the environmental benefits, to keep Calgary's local business scene thriving, and to provide good wages for Calgary workers.

REAP produces an online magazine and holds educational workshops to inform Albertans about the benefits of a sustainable society. Their work to date has been very impressive. I encourage people to visit www.reapcalgary.com to see what these folks are doing. It's exciting stuff. I had a great time learning about REAP and its efforts to promote sustainable living. I'd like to thank Stephanie Jackman in particular for all her hard work and, in fact, I think you could say, visionary work in organizing REAP and keeping it going.

The 21st century has presented humanity with perhaps its greatest challenge yet: learning how to live sustainably in the area of global climate change, maintaining prosperity while being kinder to our world and the biosphere it supports. I'd like to thank the folks at REAP for doing their part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Barons Centennial

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Originally called Blayney, the village of Barons was incorporated and the first council elected on June 6, 1910. This community became the centre for many wheat farms, and at its peak the grain elevators had a capacity of more than 1.2 million bushels. More than a dozen world and reserve grand wheat and durum championship holders were from the village of Barons.

Over the years Barons has been home to many other notables:

John Turner, who built the Paul Bunyan cultivator in 1935; Lloyd Johnson, who manufactured the Johnson blade; and Victor Erdman, who manufactured the Victory blade. All these pieces were designed to help prevent soil erosion during the Dirty Thirties. Then there's Dr. Mark Grant, who helped develop one of the first winter wheat varieties at the Lethbridge research station; and Jason Turner, who along with his figure skating partner Jamie Salé competed in the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway.

Not unlike many rural communities the seven one-room schools in the district were combined into a larger school, Barons consolidated school, which was established by this Legislature in 1915. It was one of the last to operate in Alberta. The school was also featured in the film *Superman*, filmed on location in 1977. The 1987 movie *Betrayed* was also partially filmed in both Barons and Carmangay.

Barons No. 1 discovery oil well blew in November 21, 1950, and for years produced oil and employment. In recent years in co-operation with the Alberta government and the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district the new 10,000 acre Keho-Barons irrigation project, a fully enclosed pipe low-pressure irrigation system, became a reality.

From July 9 to July 11 this summer Barons will celebrate their centennial year, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the hard-working individuals and the community there for their pride and dedication in making this a reality.

Thank you.

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

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the environment and, basically, the bread and butter of my constituency, the oil sands capital of the world. We have a very rich history over the past 40 years, dating back to AOSTRA and, of course, the Alberta Research Council in terms of the scientific advancements we have made. But with a two-and-a-half-year-old son it is clear we have much more work to be done.

I often have said in the past that we need to save labels for planets, not for people, because any time that we actually start labelling people, we're disenfranchising them. We're actually pigeonholing them and, really, like a boxer saying: you go into this corner, you go into this corner, come out, and let's fight.

I know that the Minister of Energy's comments when he talks about how we're going to counterattack some comments on what environmentalists have done, are well intended, but I think that in today's 21st century we need to be more strategic. What I mean by that is that rather than wearing a hat with a lightning rod on your head and going over to Brussels, it may be more strategic, similar to the national oil sands task force that we created back in 1997, to build partnerships, working together and lowering the rhetoric because with every counterattack there is usually another attack.

I do believe that that would hurt my constituency in the oil sands, that I'm very proud of. It is the bread and butter of this province and of my community. Let us be strategic as we go forward and not be like a Jethro Bodine. I know the Minister of Energy clearly is well intended, but his statesmanlike approach has been more a little bit of a rumble-tumble type of approach. We need to be strategic as we go forward. This is the message that I've heard from industry. We want to move forward in a strategic way in terms of celebrating this rich resource that we have been blessed with.

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

Helping Hands of Hope

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise today and recognize an incredible new charitable organization here in the city of Edmonton, namely the Helping Hands of Hope foundation. The foundation currently supports individuals across the globe living in poverty in some very unique ways.

Firstly, for seniors in Vietnam who have lost their eyesight, this organization provides the needed funding for them to receive cataract surgery, giving them back their independence and allowing them a renewed chance to assist their families with things like child care and food preparation. These surgeries can actually raise the standard of living of an entire family in Vietnam.

The organization's second project targets those living below the poverty line in Nepal. The Helping Hands of Hope foundation provides clean water to these people by donating BioSand filters, which can remove up to 99 per cent of the harmful contaminants. Further, the organization works with the people to teach them the proper use of filters, along with sanitation and hygiene practices. Altogether, this donation, which amounts to a total cost of \$40, contributes to these individuals' health and well-being and prevents the spread of disease.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday the organization hosted their inaugural fundraiser, the first annual Global Fest, which featured exceptional food and multicultural performances. I had an opportunity to be in attendance at this event as the foundation's first guest speaker. It was a privilege and honour to meet all the compassionate women who are the driving force of this organization, namely Lise Durand, president, founder, and director; Randle Wong, cofounder and director; Debbie Bildfell, secretary; Tam Duong, executive member; Dr. Patricia Sigurdson, treasurer; and Karen Smith, events coordinator.

They have been working tirelessly as a group of women to see that they achieve their goals. Thank you to this organization for their determination and humanitarian efforts. I wish them all the best continued success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adding to the increasingly long list of government health mismanagement is the July 1 implementation of the new seniors' drug plan. The government hasn't updated the website since fall, and seniors are left questioning what these changes mean for them. Most seniors are on fixed incomes, and if they can't afford or struggle with the increase, then their families will have to step in and pick up the tab. To the Premier. Seniors want to know: why do they have to pay for their health premiums, for drugs or not, when the rest of Albertans don't?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe 80 per cent of the seniors' drug coverage is carried by the taxpayer. There are some changes with respect to income levels, et cetera, but we're continuing to work through that particular area. We want to make sure that everyone is treated fairly in the province of Alberta. The minister may have some further information on it, but we're working through some detail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the Premier: how will seniors who already have pharmaceutical plans like the Alberta Retired Teachers' Association or Veterans Affairs be notified to opt out of this program, or is everyone required to opt in? What's happening?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're working through further details. Our main priority here is to make sure that those that cannot afford to pay have a program there that will support them. We're working out the details in terms of some of the other income levels and some of the other issues that come forward in this particular area.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Premier, it's three months away. Given that the average income of seniors living in rural areas is much lower than seniors living in cities, why did the government choose the rural income level as the marker at which seniors will have to pay the new monthly premium? This disadvantages urban seniors, who have a higher cost of living.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure where the hon. member is coming from in terms of rural income levels and urban. I think there's quite a mix. I know that there are a lot of people living in larger urban areas that are struggling as seniors, and that's why we're looking at a much broader range, to make sure that everyone in this province is treated equitably.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, in 2007 this government signed an agreement with the Alberta teachers. At the time the Premier wrote to ATA, "I pledge to seek the Legislative Assembly's support for the necessary funding to enable the Memorandum of Agreement's full execution." Now the government is sending mixed signals about its willingness to live up to the agreement on teachers' wages, and school boards are more than concerned that they soon will be footing the bill. To the Premier: will the Premier, please, clearly articulate how his government is going to provide ongoing funding for this agreement?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's anything unclear about it at all. We clearly indicated to school boards, in fact just yesterday, that the full 5.99 per cent increase on the average weekly earnings from last year, after arbitration, will be funded in their budgets and annualized. I've also indicated to them that the anticipated increases for September 1 this year and next year, we understand, now have to be calculated based on the average weekly earnings index. Now I have to work with the ATA and the Alberta school boards to figure out how we're going to do that, not on a one-year basis but over the period of time.

Ms Pastoor: Well, to the Premier, but I'm sure it'll go to the Minister of Education. You've answered part of this, but failing that, failing taking the responsibility for the arbitrator's ruling could force districts to reduce staff or cut services. Is that right?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I've indicated to school boards is that we are anticipating, in fact we know, that there's going to be an increase in our student population starting last year and moving forward over the next number of years, including perhaps up to 10 years. We'll see an increase in student population. It would be imprudent to cut back our teacher numbers in that period of time, so I've asked them to plan their teaching staff, teaching ratios, on the same basis as they had last year. I understand that may require them

to draw on operating surpluses this year or even in some cases run a deficit. But over the next two or three years we'll sort out exactly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Pastoor: A good segue into my question. How can the Minister of Education expect school boards to survive off their reserves indefinitely, especially when some boards lack reserves and the Minister of Education has been clawing back money even from those that have it?

The Speaker: There are no preambles in questions.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, school boards across the province are in an excellent fiscal position because of how well they've been funded in the past. We know that they had last year \$440 million of operating reserves. Now that's down to about \$360 million, still sufficient to be able to finance their operations. Some school boards don't. We've said that we will work with them to make sure not that they can run a deficit just indiscriminately, but if they need to run a deficit in order to finance the cost of teachers going forward, we'll work with them on that.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

High-intensity Residential Fires

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have had at least four massive condo fires in Alberta in relatively new buildings in the last seven years and an untold number of examples where a house catches fire and takes out, oh, six or seven houses with it. In May 2008 the government announced immediate action to require sprinklers for balconies, attics, and crawl spaces in multifamily buildings, but it took almost one year to actually make the required changes to the building codes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did it take a year for this government to take "immediate action" to improve fire safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes to the Alberta building codes were adopted on March 12, 2009, and came into law just a little later, as they always do. Now, this allowed us time to adjust building and inspection practices and development plans and infrastructure. There are technical complexities that are required of the regulations, and the drafting, approval, and passages of the amendment regulations were completed, and it took time. It was completed, then, by March 2009.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, given that the government made the point on May 23, 2008, of saying that we would not wait until the model national codes were amended because the high rate of building activity in this province made it such a priority to act right away to save lives and property, why did everything then go dark for 10 months? Why did it take so long?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, we were very proactive in taking actions to protect Albertans. We've got the strictest fire codes in the country. We've updated our building codes more than two years ahead of any other jurisdiction. That's two

years over and before any other province. We took time to do a good job with consulting stakeholders and the public and to do the technical work that was needed. We wanted to assure that we would get things right.

Mr. Taylor: Two years ahead of the national code and one year too late for the 300 people who were burned out in Millrise last week.

Was this delay of immediate action because of pressure from the home building industry, and does the government think that pressure was warranted?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are normal transition periods that are happening out there, and we have to transition and work with the industry to allow that to happen. I want to emphasize the fact that we had some very, very high standards before the codes came into place, and now we have even better standards. Again, I re-emphasize: we're the most stringent standards in the country.

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

Funding for Special-needs Foster Children

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day goes by, and Albertans observe that this government doesn't know whether they're spending or cutting. We hear from front-line workers and service providers about problems in the departments. We read about waste and mismanagement. We know that leadership starts at the top. My question is to the Premier. Why didn't this Premier get the minister of children's services to cut her ministerial and deputy budgets to show leadership instead of asking the department to take cuts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all ministers took the action. There's over \$40 million worth of reductions in ministerial reductions across management positions in government, so that's \$40 million more to put into front-line services.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they continue to scare the people of Alberta. Foster parents, agents, and patients have all witnessed this government's cutting. My question to the Premier: will the Premier assure this Assembly that the highly respected CEO of region 6 is not demoted or fired because this minister claims her directive wasn't followed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, those may be personnel matters. I don't know the background information of what had transpired or didn't transpire. Those are personnel matters and not open for discussion in terms of a policy discussion, and that's what question period is all about.

Mr. Hinman: But there's something that isn't sounding right here.

Some Hon. Members: Question. Question.

Mr. Hinman: "Question. Question." Why don't you listen for a second or two?

If we're to believe the minister's version of the events, she must produce original documentation that confirms the direction that she gave to the staff. When will she table the documents to this Assembly?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, taking this on a bit more serious note.

When we start dealing with the lives of children under our care or those of foster parents, that go out of their way to support children that in some cases have been abandoned by their family, when some of these issues come forward, it's unfortunate that some choose to play politics with a very serious situation. Had anyone who had notice of this, either a foster parent or the member of the opposition, come directly to the minister and raised this issue, we would have been able to deal with it immediately rather than having some foster parents live through agony strictly for a political purpose.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Conference Board of Canada, a well-respected economic research organization, says that natural gas prices are on the rise, actually projecting industry revenue to increase almost threefold in this year alone, and they made those projections before the latest royalty backdown by this government. Will the Premier admit that the cuts to royalties are completely unnecessary and that growth is dependent on market price, not the very limited royalty increase that his government previously brought in?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the same projections that have come back and forth over the years. I remember that just last year or two years ago projections were that oil was going to be at \$200 a barrel; the very same year it went from \$72 to \$147 and back down to \$35. So projections are projections.

We live according to the best information available, and we're going to use those various pieces of information that come forward to government and make the best projections in terms of our budgets not only for this year but the rollout over the next two to three years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier cut royalties by \$785 million a year – and that's just the latest cut – and given that the Premier is trying to sell his multibillion dollar gift to the oil and gas industry as a job-creation measure and given that it is clear that prices will drive the market, not royalty adjustments, will the Premier admit that his royalty giveaway will not create more activity or more jobs but simply pad the bottom line of oil and gas corporations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that a change in policy will grow a much larger pie, and the slice of the pie that we have will be even larger of a much larger pie, and that is the future income that will support all of the programs and services that all of us enjoy in this province. Some of that revenue will be generated to cover those costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. His pie is half-baked.

Given that the Conference Board of Canada expects gas companies to see profits of more than \$8 billion a year by 2014 and given that the projection was calculated before royalty rates were lowered yet again, why does the Premier continue to insist that his oil and gas friends needed another royalty rollback when clearly they did not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, misinformation on behalf

of the member. When we look at overall generated profits, he's not saying that all of those profits were generated in the province of Alberta. In fact, we lost competitiveness. Many of those profits were generated in different parts of the world, different countries. So that's why we had to look at the changing market conditions, the price of natural resources, some of the innovation and new technology that's necessary to get at gas that is in an aging basin here, in the western sedimentary basin in the province of Alberta.

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

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Education suggested that perhaps school boards may have to run deficits. AHS is running a deficit; universities are running deficits. Does the minister of finance – my question is to him today – plan to have a road map on how he figures out the elimination of these deficits so that future generations will not be burdened with this incredible deficit burden?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do. The question of the teacher compensation was sent to arbitration, and we're respecting the outcome of that. I believe the Minister of Education reported that in the two out-years there are some challenges. We'll be looking to the Teachers' Association, as we will to all of the public sector, to work co-operatively with us and do what's best for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the minister of finance, in terms of his estimates of the accumulated deficits for the fiscal year 2010-11 for these entities, anticipating relative to their deficits?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I didn't particularly understand the hon. member's question. We projected a \$4.7 billion deficit for this year. That's revenues minus expenditures over revenues. If he has a specific question about a portion of the budget, he'd have to give me that either in writing or as a second question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister of finance taking a similar approach, hope and prayer of gas prices rising and oil sands prices rising, to the Getty era, and is this not a very dangerous precedent for the minister of finance to be following that road map?

Dr. Morton: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, we're doing just the opposite. In the 48 hours after the budget was released, all of the chartered banks and several other financial institutions released reviews of the Alberta budget. Every one of those reviews said that our estimates and our projections on oil and gas were accurate and consistent with theirs and, if anything, a little on the conservative – i.e. cautious – side. So we're on very solid ground there, sir.

Court Service Caseloads

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure the Justice minister is aware, it is extremely rare to hear a sitting judge criticize the administration of justice, as was the situation in Medicine Hat just last week. Judge

Fisher noted that a lack of funds was to blame for the haphazard court service in Medicine Hat. My question for the Justice minister is this: is the judge correct in noting that the justice system is faltering in Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was an interesting comment made last week by the judge that the hon. member has referred to. We, in fact, did consult as to what was going on that day in court, had a conversation with some of the people who worked there. Our understanding at the time is that the sitting judge had recently spent some time overseas looking at the possibility of implementing a particular docket court model. His comments, we understand and have been advised by the people who work for the Department of Justice, were with respect to the process that he would like to see introduced, that would actually improve the administration of justice, and we're happy to always consider those.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting spin, but Bill Cocks, a former Crown prosecutor, was also quoted in the *Medicine Hat News* as follows about this government: you can talk about being tough on crime and being a law and order government, but if you don't put . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, remember? You signed the document: no preambles. Remember? You signed that. You're a man of integrity, I believe, so let's get to the question.

Mr. Hehr: I hear you.

Well, then, to the minister: why aren't you addressing the gridlock facing the courts in Medicine Hat, Alberta, like all of these people are asking you to?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are. The mean times in Medicine Hat are five days better than in the rest of the province, and we'll continue to improve the administration of justice right across the province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Crown prosecutors, defence attorneys, and the judiciary don't seem to agree with the hon. minister. So, really, who's right? Are you right, or are these people just talking for the sake of talking?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, my assessment of the day, based on conversations that have taken place in our department, is that there were three people who made very different comments with respect to an incident. I understand that the hon. member is characterizing them all as being the same; in our opinion, they're not.

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

Integrated Land Management

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that over the last few years there's been considerable collaboration between the forestry and the energy sectors to share access roads, thus reducing the environmental footprint of resource development in the green areas of the province. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How much land has been saved from destruction as a result of this co-operation between these two industries?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, to give a definite answer relative to the acreage would be a bit difficult. Integrated land management is an approach that we've been working with for a number of years, and it is used by industry regularly now in the province of Alberta. The idea is very simple. What we want to do, of course, is to work together to plan the operations on the landscape and minimize linear disturbance. We've got about a 45 per cent reduction in the road and linear disturbances proposed in areas like the Kakwa.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how are you and your department able to get these diverse groups working together to achieve this example of integrated land management?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a team approach. Just to give you an idea of some of the associations and so on, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, the Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Alberta Forest Products Association are some of the people that are involved in integrated land management planning, and of course it goes beyond that to a number of the major players that are active on the landscape.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since land-use planning is a major initiative in your department, how does this collaboration fit in with the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. That is going to be a very key piece as we move forward. Of course, I think that the member knows that the land-use framework discussions and the work that we're doing now with respect to this initiative is a huge piece of business for all Albertans. Integrated land management will be one of the supporting tools that we use in the land-use framework in order to properly manage landscapes in Alberta.

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

Distracted Driving

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of other jurisdictions have distracted driving legislation, including seven provinces, 18 states, even China, India, and Russia. The Minister of Transportation explains his lack of action: "There's no [use] putting in a law that doesn't cover the actual problem." To the Minister of Transportation. Places like Washington, DC, saw a 43 per cent reduction in phone use because of their legislation. Why does the minister think that distracted driving legislation doesn't work?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely never, ever said that distracted driving legislation doesn't work. I said that we have to put together the proper legislation in order to address the big picture and all types of distracted driving. If you look at 90 per cent of the other places, all they've done is taken a one-off and said, "Oh, we're not going to allow cellphones," or "Oh, we're not going to allow texting machines." Yes, those are a distraction, and they're a problem, but there are a whole lot of other distractions out there, and we have to address that whole big picture.

Mr. Kang: How long will it take for the minister to get to the actual problem, Mr. Speaker? Given that the minister's other excuse is that there's more distraction than just cellphones, has the minister looked at New Hampshire's law, which includes eating and applying makeup?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again, he's talking of a one-off. Now we go and address eating as a problem. I agree with him that all these things are a problem. It's to be able to put them all together. If you cannot make it effective and if you cannot make it enforceable, then we shouldn't pass it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the question I'm asking you: when are you going to make it effective, Mr. Minister? When are you going to make it the law? Given that the distracted driving legislation is not like reinventing the wheel, how much longer will Albertans have to wait before the minister begins to take this seriously? How long?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about reinventing wheels. In fact, there is no wheel in this particular instance because nobody has brought out the effective one that does it right, that makes sure we address it all. We have to get that through that hon. member's head: quit asking the same question, and help us get it right.

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

Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question may not be as exciting, but I'll try. Affordable housing and homelessness is an important issue for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark. In 1993 I was studying there for about a month, and you could get a house for \$500. A lot of empty houses. Then came the boom and the oil sands activity. There was a big need for housing. When oil was at its peak, there were a lot of homeless in Fort McMurray. Now the oil sands have cooled, and housing has cooled. My question to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: why does your department insist at this point in time on building a big housing unit at Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I have to say that there's no possible way that I could match the last performance in the answer. However, I do have some information for this member in and of itself. We're preparing for the next phase of growth. If we go back, in fact, to 2007, if we look further back, we've had the highest economic output that we've had in a long time. If we wait until we get to that point again, all that is going to happen is that we're going to be two years behind. This is part of the plan. Mr. Speaker, we're ready. By 2012 we're going to have exhausted the amount of land at current rates in Fort McMurray.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. There's a substantial amount of money that could probably be better spent in some of the major cities, specifically in Edmonton-Meadowlark, to address the issues of my constituents of chronic homelessness. Instead of building fancy new condo communities . . .

The Speaker: Remember the preamble thing we just talked about? The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Phase I of Parsons Creek actually includes about 20 per cent in Fort McMurray of affordable housing, and that's roughly where we're going. This is part of our plan. Fort McMurray is an important part of our economy, and we're looking to ensure that, in fact, all Albertans benefit from this. In fact, through transfer payments all Canadians benefit from our plans here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

My last question is to the same minister. This project was desperately needed three years ago. Does this minister have a long-term housing plan for this province and for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, and does he anticipate problems instead of reacting to them?

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do anticipate problems. Any issues, any problems that we look at are decided on an individual basis. We're working with the RM of Wood Buffalo to address any environmental concerns and also any housing concerns. This member, if he likes, can go and drive his blue van right up there and take a look at it.

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

Cancer Services

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Cancer diagnosis and treatment require a tightly co-ordinated team that includes pathology, radiology, surgery, pharmacy, nursing, and other services which the Alberta Cancer Board used to provide. The previous minister of health disbanded the Alberta Cancer Board, and that cancer care delivery system is being dismantled. Cancer pathology is being folded into general pathology, cancer pharmacy is being folded into general pharmacy, and so on. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister do the right thing for Albertans with cancer and restore the Alberta Cancer Board?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Cancer Board, the Mental Health Board, and AADAC were all amalgamated within the bigger picture of Alberta Health Services and the one superboard, as it's sometimes referred to. But I take the member's question very seriously, and I will undertake to have a look at the comments he just made.

Dr. Taft: Well, that was a pretty weak answer, Mr. Speaker.

Given that one of the awful lessons from botched cancer pathology scandals in Newfoundland and elsewhere is that cancer pathology is very specialized, why isn't the minister taking action to make sure that Alberta's cancer pathology team isn't dismantled?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there's any dismantling in the system. In fact, we're looking to augment it and hire more oncologists. There's quite an active recruitment process going on right now. I think that people in this province have grown accustomed to the fact that the oncologists we have in the two larger centres that treat cancer patients, not to mention the three that are coming on stream through the radiation therapy corridor, provide outstanding service. I think they need our support at this time.

Dr. Taft: Well, those oncologists are calling me, and they're expressing the concern, so this minister had better look into it.

How does the minister expect a fractured system, in which pharmacy, pathology, surgery, nursing, radiology, and all other services are reporting along different lines, to shorten wait times?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of that is exactly the point of having one centralized board, so all of that information that was just alluded to can be looked at, can be collected in a consistent fashion with consistent gathering of information so that we can come up with that province-wide plan that will help improve things, not make them worse. We're trying to work hard to get things better. That's why we've added the money to the budget, and that's why we're coming out with a more predictable and stable five-year funding plan. We're going to fix that.

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

2:20 Cultural Competency Initiatives

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada is projecting rapid changes to our population over the next 20 years. Major growth areas would include the aboriginal population, and it's projected that about one-third of Canada's population would be a visible minority. Learning about effective integration and development of inclusive communities speaks to the need for two-way integration. My question is to the Minister of Education. You have initiated the Inspiring Education visioning process, and you have spoken about transformative change to our educational system. I would like to know what transformative concepts and ideas you or your ministry have discussed relative to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to Inspiring Education, of course, we're engaged in a number of areas: the School Act review, which is ongoing; setting the direction for children with special needs; the FNMI Education Partnership Council – I introduced the chiefs and the presidents yesterday in the House – the tripartite MOU that we've signed with the treaty chiefs and the federal government; workforce planning; and Speak Out Alberta. There are a great number of initiatives. The Inspiring Education initiative has told us that Albertans want an education system that addresses the different learning needs of different communities.

The Speaker: Sorry. We have to move on.
The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister. Numerous studies from jurisdictions across the country talk about the need to integrate cultural competency into the operation and practice of institutions. I'd like to know what your commitment is to this requirement.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we want to move beyond acknowledging cultural diversity in creating equality to a more inclusive model that promotes equity and involves all cultural elements in our community in a meaningful way. We have a commitment in the School Act on diversity in shared values. We have guidelines for recognizing diversity and promoting respect to ensure that all learning resources, including visuals, promote respect and understanding for all members of society.

Ms Woo-Paw: What authority and opportunities does the ministry have to ensure that school systems meaningfully and systematically incorporate and implement cultural competency throughout the organization?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, helping students become culturally thoughtful and respectful starts in kindergarten and before and continues right through the system. We have to ensure that our curriculum is infused with the principles of our heritage and the principles of our cultures, particularly with respect to First Nations and Métis students in the province. All Alberta students need to know and understand that cultural heritage, not just the FNMI students. Through broadening their understanding, teachers and administrators are able to see how important cultural competency is to areas of curriculum and development for all students.

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

Foster Care System

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday during Children and Youth Services estimates the minister repeatedly denied there were plans to cut funding to foster parents of special-needs children. She was surrounded at the time by nine senior ministry staff, none of whom uttered a peep about the planned cuts that the NDP subsequently discovered and reported on yesterday. My question is for the minister. How can Albertans trust your claims of protecting vulnerable children when you clearly can't keep up with what's going on in your own ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct: at Committee of Supply I made it very clear that my understanding was that there wouldn't be any reduction in foster support services or resources in that. That was because of the direction that I had given two to three weeks previously not to reduce the supports or services or funding to foster care. I can assure you that I realize, too, and knowing that the buck stops at my desk, there are at times things that are not understood in the way that they're put forward, and this is just one of those cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, notwithstanding that the Premier seems to believe it's inappropriate to discuss some of these contradictions in public, given that the minister has repeatedly assured the House that cuts to her ministry would not affect families when, in fact, that was exactly what was planned at the time, how can the minister fail to see the absurdity of her assurances and refuse to admit that cuts to her ministry will negatively impact the level of care provided to Alberta's children?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, as you know, Committee of Supply is a three-hour meeting. We did discuss this ministry at that meeting for three hours and, in particular, the area of child intervention. As I let this member know and other members at the committee, I trust what my staff has brought forward as to the change and the shift in practice of the way that child intervention is occurring in the field through the good work of 1,600 front-line workers. I trust that. I've assured

you, Mr. Speaker, and the Assembly previously that I'm monitoring this closely. If I see that it's different, I will go back through the right processes if more funding is required.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this ministry has been plagued by repeated cases of negligent treatment toward foster families and their children and given that the minister's tarnished credibility grows darker each time she's asked to take responsibility for a foolish policy she doesn't know anything about, when will the minister launch an independent, public inquiry into the foster care system and do away with the political leash she maintains on the children's advocate?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's always interesting how somebody can make a quantum leap to where we're into a public inquiry. Simply because there was a direction from me as the minister not to cut resources or supports or funding to foster care, especially for children with special needs, and an individual in the field did not follow through with that direction, now we're into: we should have a public inquiry of the whole system. The answer to that is categorically no.

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

Online Driver Licensing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans move around a lot. In 2006 in Edmonton alone we had over 97,000 intraprovincial migrants. Each time they change addresses, the Traffic Safety Act requires people to change their driver's licence in person and to fork out \$22.50. In comparison, Saskatchewan folks can update their billing and address information online 24/7, or in Ontario their self-serve kiosks allow people to change their drivers' licences for no charge. To the Minister of Service Alberta: does the minister have any plans to make driver's licence changes more accessible and cost-efficient?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During these past two years this ministry has had excellent discussions with many of the registry agents across Alberta. One of the challenges is to provide better service to Albertans – and that includes online services as well as more locations across Alberta, so it is a very serious concern – and to balance that with the protection of Albertans' information. We are certainly looking at a number of different areas.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yes, it is a challenge, and yes, it's in the private registry system. So what exactly is the minister going to do, and when can we expect the government to deliver service that at least equals Saskatchewan's?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, on the whole issue of online fees, with the registry agents that do provide those services in Alberta, we are on the lower end of the scale. That's something that I've been working on very hard because, again, it's about providing Albertans with better service and making sure they can do things that are convenient from their home, making it more convenient for Albertans but also making sure that the information is protected, whether it's a driver's licence or whether it's any other items that Albertans need to run their businesses or their homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to the same minister. Since issuing changed licences to people who have undergone gender reassignment continues to be done on a case-by-case basis and takes so long, I wonder if there isn't more at play here. When will that process be moved into the 21st century?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is with respect to the Vital Statistics Act, which has not been updated for about 50 years. That is something that we are currently working on, looking at that act and updating it. That's been an important dialogue, too. That is something that we'll be bringing forward fairly soon.

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

Property Taxes

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and this government have both stated that there will be no new taxes or no tax increases, a promise affirmed by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in his budget speech, yet many Albertans are reporting an increase in their property taxes this year. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: why are these people paying higher taxes when you yourself promised that taxes would not be going up?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we did promise that taxes were not going up, and we have kept that promise. When it comes to the education portion of the property tax, we have actually cut it by 13 per cent, and this would be the 17th year in a row that we've either frozen or cut that portion of the property tax. However, that's only one-third of property taxes. The other two-thirds is municipal, and we have no control over what municipalities do with their portion of the property tax.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental, then, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that property values have generally decreased in the last two years, why are property taxes increasing?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The market value on which the rate is applied is not the current value. Rather, it's the amount that a property might have realized if sold on the open market as of July 1 of the year prior to the taxation year. Mill rates are adjusted to ensure that the revenue remains stable in spite of price fluctuations seen in the housing market.

With respect to education property tax the education mill rate is applied on a province-wide basis and reflects average property values for the whole province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, then, to the Minister of Education: how much is raised through education property taxes, and is this amount guaranteed to fund education priorities in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. All money raised under the education property tax goes to the Alberta school foundation, and it is used to fund education across the province. We raise about \$1.6 billion in property taxes, which is more than 25 per cent of the amount that they spent on education through the provincial spending, and there's an additional \$199 million that's raised by opted-out boards.

U of A Sustainable Development Campus

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, last November I raised some questions in the Assembly on an exciting report done by the Urban Land Institute into the development at the U of A's south campus. The report advocated a bold goal for the south campus that by 2035, if everyone on Earth lived like the proposed community at the south campus, we'd arrest climate change and live sustainably within the limited resources of our planet. To the Minister of Environment: last November 17 he said that he expected to receive the final report shortly, so has he now received it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. And thank you to the member for this question because, frankly, I had forgotten that this report was under way. I'm pleased to advise the member that we have received a draft of the report. It was received a couple of weeks ago. Our staff are providing some additional input, and we should have that complete in the next two weeks. We then would expect that the university would be in a position to release the final draft of the report in three weeks to a month.

Dr. Taft: Well, that's great news.

To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: given that last November 17 the minister said that this report would be circulated widely among Campus Alberta and officials in his own department, has this happened, and has the report had an impact?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the advice from the report actually makes up part of the University of Alberta's institutional access plan and, as such, will be spread throughout Campus Alberta. In terms of the advice that was given and some of the ideas that were there, by all indications it was a very successful symposium to develop the kind of advice that Campus Alberta can look to for sustainable innovation in the future. We will incorporate that in each institution's individual access plan for their capital.

Dr. Taft: Again to the same minister: does the Department of Advanced Education and Technology place any standards for sustainability on new buildings built by universities, and if so, will he make them public?

Mr. Horner: Well, we do, I guess, depend upon the boards of governance and the executives at all of these institutions to work with us in terms of the capital plans. As in the case of the University of Alberta, we expect that they're going to be doing their work in terms of the type of capital plan that they want to put forward as it relates to the access plans that we have. It's about student placement, Mr. Speaker, and it's about sustainable communities for students to do what they need to do.

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

Harmonization of Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The competitiveness review and the resulting changes to the royalty structure were applauded by industry and are key to our government's economic plan going forward. Some industry voices, though, are calling for the harmonization of royalties between Alberta and its energy producing neighbours, B.C. and Saskatchewan. My question is to the Minister of Energy. During the extensive consultation and development process of the competitiveness review, was the harmonization of royalties between the three provinces considered, and if so, what were the outcomes of this discussion?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the short answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is no. Those discussions did not take place. But we have to remember what we've gone through for the last year: it was a competitiveness review; it was not a royalty review. The competitiveness review concluded that there were a number of areas that we needed to take action on that would frankly make us one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America. We've announced some. We're commencing others. I'm not suggesting that at some point in time we wouldn't have those discussions with our neighbouring provinces, but that was not discussed at this stage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With TILMA and the western economic partnership being clear indicators of our intentions to reduce barriers to investment and make business investment decisions easier, would it not make sense to extend this to royalties in our largest industry? What is the rationale for not doing so?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that TILMA stands for the labour mobility agreement. I think that we've made tremendous strides in ensuring that we have the ability not only for labour to move back and forth across provincial borders but for business to actually operate back and forth across borders. There's still lots of work to do there. You know, as I said earlier, royalties are only one part of it. We're always open to discussions with other provinces, whatever will make it easier for workers and also for businesses to operate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental, again to the same minister: with the task force on regulatory enhancement under way, reviewing regulations pertaining to the energy industry, will their considerations include harmonization of regulations between the energy producing provinces pursuant to the goals of TILMA and the western economic partnership?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, I said from the very beginning relative to the task force that's going to commence its work very shortly that there is nothing that is off the table, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that if through the consultations some good suggestions come forward that we could pursue with our neighbouring provinces of B.C. and Saskatchewan, we would certainly entertain that and look forward to some of those recommendations.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Fish and Game Association indicates that there is no reliable province-wide system in place to monitor chronic wasting disease, a disease that, if it spreads, could

be irrevocably detrimental to Alberta wildlife. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how can the minister claim that there is a reliable province-wide monitoring system in place when surveillance is based largely upon voluntary submission of heads by hunters?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that this surveillance program, in fact, is quite robust. In the last hunting season we had about 4,860 heads submitted that were tested, and out of those, there were 12 that were found to be positive. It still indicates a relatively low density of the disease and still concentrated on the eastern side of the province of Alberta. The program is spread across the province, so I think it's quite robust.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's budget has been cut this year along with 112 SRD staff and the disease boundaries are expanding, how will the minister be able to ensure that adequate testing will be done?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, as I said, what we have here is co-operation with the hunting community. Mr. Speaker, it's the hunters that actually help us with respect to this issue. It doesn't matter how many fish and wildlife officers there are on the ground. As long as we have and continue to have a good working relationship and the co-operation of the hunting community, the program can continue.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, given that hunt farms are a major cause of the spread of chronic wasting disease, why is the minister expressing support for hunt farms at Alberta Fish and Game Association meetings?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member gets his information from. I don't recall him sitting at any table where I may or may not have made comments relative to the issue. However, what I will say now to this House and to all Albertans is that there is a ban in place in the province of Alberta relative to hunting cervids on farms. That ban remains in place.

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

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands have again come under attack by environmental groups to give the impression that Albertans don't care about the environment. The other day one such group launched an online video game that shows the oil sands in a very unfair and negative light. The Minister of Energy has spoken recently about fighting back with the facts on a national and international scale. My question to the Minister of Energy: when is he going to launch this much-needed counterattack against these outrageous messages?

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo does not want us to be out there publicly defending our oil sands, we're going to. It's not just going to be the government that's going to do that. Later under tablings I'm going to table – I happened to notice just before question period today in the *Hill Times* a number of advertisements put on by the labour council of Alberta, by various companies in Alberta, by the Forest Products Association, all trying their best to counter this propaganda campaign.

Mr. Sandhu: My first supplemental to the same minister. I noticed in the media that a major buyers/sellers conference is taking place in Edmonton over the next two days. There are a number of Ontario and Quebec companies here seeking business, and I would like to know if the minister will be meeting with these companies when they are in Edmonton?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Premier today is addressing this buyers/sellers forum here in the city of Edmonton. I am meeting tomorrow with the minister of industry from Ontario, who is here as part of that mission. I plan to ensure that she has a full understanding of not only how important the oil sands are to Alberta but to the rest of the country. They're important in two ways. As the member says, we have Ontario suppliers here selling to the oil sands, but probably more importantly the federal government has significant tax revenue that comes from Albertans and Alberta businesses that goes to the federal treasury that ends up in equalization payments to other provinces.

Mr. Sandhu: My final question to the same minister: does the minister plan to ensure that employees of these companies that supply goods and services to the oil sands are made aware that their employment is directly tied to a vibrant oil industry?

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important. It's not just governments that have to understand that the vibrant oil patch – a strong Alberta makes a strong Canada. There are many who work in manufacturing in central Canada whose livelihoods depend on exports to the province of Alberta. The oil sands and the oil industry are purchasers of billions of dollars' worth of goods from Ontario and Quebec every year. It's going to be our job to ensure that those who work in these particular facilities understand that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today. There were 114 questions and responses from 19 different members. Of the 19, nine were Official Opposition members, one was the third party, two from the fourth party, one from the independent, and six from private government members.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from the Alberta Fish and Game Association and the appropriate number of copies that go through some of the points they bring up on chronic wasting disease and how they believe the disease could be more effectively monitored here in this province.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the last answer to my question, I have five copies of three particular advertisements that appear in the *Hill Times* that I'd like to table with the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a news story in which the Conference Board of Canada says that any increase in drilling rates will be because of higher prices, not the royalty rollback. This information relates to the questions that the member asked earlier today.

As well, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 24 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds, as part of a postcard campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, response to a question raised by Mr. MacDonald, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on February 17, 2010, Service Alberta main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar; Mr. Fawcett, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill; Mr. Hinman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore; and Ms Woo-Paw, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, on February 24, 2010, Department of Finance and Enterprise main estimates debate.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010.

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

Mr. Taylor: That was quick, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and join in second reading debate on Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. This, of course, involves a tremendous amount of money: \$39 billion in operating expenses, \$7 billion in capital expenses, a deficit of \$4.7 billion. I see the President of the Treasury Board is shaking his head at me right now. Okay. [interjection] I didn't hear that, but anyway maybe *Hansard* did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor if he wishes to take it.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, a tremendous amount of money involved in the running of this province for 12 months: \$39 billion in operating expenses, and we are running a deficit this year of some \$4.7 billion. There have been many concerns expressed by many members in numerous parties in this House about the notion that we've gone into deficit spending now, and there doesn't seem to be a clear plan to take us out of deficit spending, just a promise that we'll be back in the black in three years. That's kind of a vague promise in our view over here on this side of the House, a kind of vague, trust-us sort of promise that somehow, God willing and the creek don't rise, everything will be fine again in three years.

Now, I have to do a bit of a balancing act on this, Mr. Speaker, because after all, I recognize and I think most of us in this House do recognize that stimulus spending done at the right time can have a positive impact on an economy that's in recession. There's certainly

some stimulus spending in the capital budget, a great deal of stimulus spending in the capital budget, in fact.

I think the government has done the right thing by putting extra money into health care, although I'm still waiting to see what the plan is around that. Right now it appears more like the minister of health wanted to use his Visa card, and the bank said: no, you've got to clear the outstanding balance before we'll let you use it again. I got a chuckle out of the minister of health on that one. That's where a good chunk of the extra money in health has gone, but there's also money above and beyond that for investment in the system.

I think, Mr. Speaker, it's fair to say that we have a shortage of doctors, we have a shortage of nurses, and we have a shortage of hospital beds in this province, at least open hospital beds. We certainly have a bizarre situation in Calgary, where we have a number of new hospital beds that have been opened over the last year, and a corresponding number of old hospital beds have been closed down because when this government went through its capital planning exercise around money to invest in capital build for the Calgary health region, it somehow forgot, failed, otherwise messed up the notion that when those capital projects were done, in order to operate them, there would need to be a corresponding envelope of operating money, which didn't materialize.

I think there's no question, Mr. Speaker, that in order to overcome at least some of the problems that we have in health care in this province, it's going to require an extra investment of money, as we've seen in this budget. So that's good. But it's also been, I think it's fair to say, a politically expedient thing for this government to do, to find a bunch of extra money to invest in health care, because health care has become a great concern to an awful lot of Albertans, including older Albertans, who are more likely to vote.

2:50

I wouldn't be making this comment, I guess, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't been through the debate and the turmoil that persons with developmental disabilities and their loved ones and their care providers had to go through earlier this year around plans, that were at least temporarily thwarted, to cut spending to PDD. We've got problems with Children and Youth Services. We've got cuts happening in other areas, and it's interesting to me that the cuts that we see happening in this budget tend to be cuts in areas where people are perhaps a little bit marginalized anyway, unlikely to vote, unlikely to cause trouble for the government if the government cuts their money.

Still we have a \$4.7 billion deficit, and still we have a tremendous amount of money being spent. It really is stunning, the amount of money that we go through in the run of a year. I'm left to wonder whether this government has really gone through its operations with a sharp pencil and done everything that it needed to do, that it should be doing to determine where wasteful spending is happening and where spending could be at least redirected to areas of higher priority.

I don't think, Mr. Speaker, at least not to my satisfaction, that this government has yet succeeded in defining or putting out for province-wide debate what are the core programs and services that are considered to be sacrosanct, beyond being touched, beyond being cut. I think that if you define core programs and core services, you say: "These are the things that Albertans hold most dear. These are the things that are most important in terms of public works and public services for the public good. These are the things that we must – we absolutely must – spend money on. These are the things and the people and the programs and the services we absolutely must invest in."

Then, by definition, by default, the programs and the services that

do not fall into the basket of core programs and services are those where you can go back in and take a second look and say: "Well, when times are tight, when people are hurting, when the health care system is in a mess and needs to be fixed, needs to be triaged at least and, hopefully, made better, when we have some of the problems that we have in this province right now within the context of a sluggish economy, which is recovering, albeit slowly, where are the areas where we actually can cut? Is this an area that we really need to spend money on this fiscal year?" I don't think that's been done yet. I have not seen a whole lot of evidence as we went through the budget debates, the estimates debates, over the last five or six weeks or so. I've not seen a lot of evidence, a lot of clear definition of what is a core program and what isn't.

I will speak entirely personally now, and I'll be very interested to hear what some of my colleagues on all sides of the House say about this. It's been again this year an interesting exercise, going through the estimates debates as we have in the evening in the various policy field committees, because if you are the Official Opposition critic on a particular department, it does give you the opportunity to sit with your counterpart, with the minister, and get into some fairly – depending on the minister, depending on the bureaucrats surrounding him, depending on the time and the tides and everybody's mood – detailed, in-depth discussion about why the money is being spent in the way that it is and what the priorities are. You can actually, from time to time at least, learn a fair amount about what's going on, not always, but from time to time, again depending on the minister, depending on the critic, depending on the time and the tides and the whole shebang.

I do find that a rather interesting way to go about it. However, I can't help but note that we still, when all is said and done, give each department, each ministry, whether it is Health and Wellness at \$15 billion or Service Alberta at about \$350 million, equal time. Three hours of debate for the ministry starting each night at 6:30, ending each night at 9:30, with the Official Opposition critic getting first crack in a back-and-forth exchange with the minister for an hour, a five-minute break for coffee or juice, and then we're back at it with the member of the third party and the critic from the fourth party and then a back and forth between opposition and governing party members of the committee. At the end of three hours we're done.

Now, we have the opportunity, of course, we being anybody on that particular committee or anybody who is sitting in on that particular committee for that department's debate on that evening, to submit a number of written questions and a reasonable expectation of answers back from the minister within a couple of weeks. I haven't been keeping track, by the way, Mr. Speaker, as to what the delivery rate has been on that promise, but I know that a number of ministers over the course of the last few weeks did promise to get back to us with written answers in a couple of weeks, so hopefully if those promises haven't been kept, they will be acted upon with this gentle admonition from this critic on this side of the House.

Still, when all is said and done, you come to a situation where debate on a total of \$39 billion worth of spending is governed entirely by the clock. Nearly half of that budget, \$15 billion in Health, was debated in three hours. We may have debated this budget department by department, ministry by ministry over the last five or six weeks, but the Health and Wellness budget is \$15 billion. The operating budget is \$39 billion. Health and Wellness got three hours just like every other department got three hours. We did a huge chunk of this budget in three hours, and at the end of three hours it was like: well, okay, there you go; that's all the time we have for that.

Now, that approach works just fine when you're doing a radio talk show, I guess. You know, when you're doing a radio talk show, you

are all powerful, and you can decide three weeks hence that you're going to bring the topic back if you feel like it again. But it doesn't work so well, in my opinion, in the public interest. I don't know that the public interest is at all served by saying that we will devote three hours and only three hours to debating the estimates of the ministry of health, especially this year – especially this year – when there's been a significant additional investment of public dollars in health care and especially this year when health care is in such an obvious mess. We have gone through a failed restructuring of the system. I think it's a failed restructuring of the system.

I think the current minister of health spends all his time undoing the work of the previous minister of health. I mean, it's kind of an ongoing process because, of course, the work put into motion by the previous minister of health is carried on by the Alberta Health Services Board and CEO. They're still in place, and they're still, you know, beavering around and doing their little thing reorganizing the health ministry, while the current minister of health is coming along behind, aided and abetted sometimes by the Official Opposition health critic and critics from the other parties, who are pointing out: "Hey, you know what? The way we do cancer care in this province now isn't working anymore. The way we do this isn't working anymore." Nobody knows anything in health care in terms of who reports to whom or who's supposed to be accountable or take charge or make the final decision and have the buck stop on their desk for this or that particular area of health care, and the poor minister of health is running around after Stephen Duckett and the Alberta Health Services Board trying to put a leash on that pit bull that got out of its cage.

For this we're spending \$15 billion, and we spent three hours debating it. I don't think that's enough, Mr. Speaker. I really don't. Now, there are other ministries, the Ministry of Energy, for instance, where I felt as though that was time reasonably well spent. I felt that questions were answered, so I'll give high marks on that to the Minister of Energy. There are other ministries that probably got full and adequate debate within that three-hour time frame.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, it would be better – it really would be better – if we would adopt the approach taken by so many other jurisdictions in this country and simply start debating the budget and keep going on it until it is done. If we need to call the minister of health back for another session in a couple of weeks' time after we've finished questioning him for an evening, we could do that, and we could get supplementary answers to our questions; likewise with the Minister of Education or the minister of advanced education or the Minister of Municipal Affairs or any other ministry.

We have attempted to shoehorn these many billions of dollars into a very tight framework for debate, and the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that when the time has elapsed, the debate is finished whether the public has been served by that debate or not. I don't think that's a particularly wise or proper, appropriate stewardship of the taxpayers' money in the province of Alberta. I don't think we're being proper stewards of the people of Alberta's money.

I think we should take a long hard look over this fiscal year at a different approach to doing this. We spend a tremendous amount of money in this province. We still spend on a per capita basis well above many other jurisdictions in this country. We don't give it the full and complete debate that it needs. We don't know, and we will never know if we continue to debate the budget according to the rules that we have been using, where we're getting value for our money as taxpayers, whether we're getting value for our money as taxpayers, where things can be tightened up, where more money needs to be allocated. There simply isn't enough in the system to

look after our foster children or our elderly or our sick. We don't know.

When you look at the actual budget, the budget for Alberta Health Services is one line. What does that mean? What does that mean? Nine billion dollars, you know, for Alberta Health Services. Well, gee, that's nice. What does that mean? Where is that going? I'm not sure that anybody can answer that question, quite frankly, given the performance of Alberta Health Services over the last year, but it sure would be nice to give it a shot and see if we could find out. It sure would be nice to get a budget document that actually breaks that down.

It sure would be nice to have the feeling that when the nine health regions were collapsed into the Alberta Health Services superboard, it wasn't just an opportunity to fudge the numbers a little bit further. I think fudge, Mr. Speaker, I will freely admit, gets a little close to the line in terms of unparliamentary language, but there is a degree of obfuscation that one suspects could be going on there in that there is this massive amount of money as a line item in the budget, and we really don't know how it's allocated, how it's broken down.

I think that we should. I think that the people of Alberta have a right to know how their public funds are being spent on public health care. Public health care is an extremely, extremely important thing to the people of Alberta, to the people of Canada. But as much as we love our public health care system in this country, in this province, it's also extremely important that we know where our public money is going and how it's being put to use and that we as citizens can look at that and be able to make an informed decision as to whether we are getting value for our money or not.

We may like public health care. We may love publicly funded health care. But that doesn't mean that as citizens we're prepared to stick our heads in the sand and say: "Well, okay, Mr. Minister, government of Alberta; however you want to spend our \$15 billion on health care, that's all right with us. We don't mind waiting 13 hours in emergency. We don't mind the fact that 1 in every 4 Calgarians can't find a family doctor. We don't mind the doctor shortages that exist in so many other parts of the province. We don't mind that primary care networks, PCNs, should have been set up in more locations, I think, than they have been so far, that it seems to be an awfully hard slog and an awfully slow process to get those things set up." We do mind that we have to wait so long for health care. We do mind that we have to wait so long to find out why that thing that is hurting us is hurting us and what to do about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to this Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. You know, every time we talk about this topic, I guess, we come back to the same thing. It's just that the spending of this government over the last several years has been out of control. It's been a long, hard road for sure. I mean, we've been spending more than we should for a very long time. I think everyone in this Assembly realizes that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

A lot of people in this Assembly, certainly on our side and definitely on the other side as well, campaigned on trying to bring our fiscal house back in order and get our spending under control, so this year, this budget, was an exceptional opportunity to make good on that campaign promise to try to get our spending under control and to try to show fiscal leadership. I remember during the 2008 campaign listening to the Premier speak about balancing the budget.

One of the things that he brought forward and he campaigned on was that under his watch we would not run deficits. Under no circumstances would we run deficits. He was very strong on that. I remember going to the doors of the people in my community and saying: this is what this Premier and this government stands for, no deficits. We were going to be good stewards of the books. We were going to be good fiscal managers. That's what we were going to do.

A lot of people in my constituency who were very unhappy with some of the direction of the government at that time with regards to the Royalty Review Panel and things like that said that they would support the governing party at that time but that they needed to get their act together on the financial side and on the energy side as well as on health care and a few other issues or else they would not support the government in the future. So I said that I would advocate those things as hard as I possibly could and have attempted to do so over the last two years both in and outside of the governing party.

As I look at the spending in this bill, the reason I'm so worried about this, Mr. Speaker, is that like many people in this Chamber I have children of my own. I don't have grandchildren yet, but many people here do have grandchildren. I have four kids; they're all under the age of six. The first is just entering kindergarten at Nose Creek elementary in Airdrie.

You know, I look at them – and it changes your perception on life when you have kids, obviously – and one of those things that you think about is what their future is going to look like. You start thinking about some of the advantages that you have in life, some of the good things that you have in life, and the opportunities that I've had in life, which I believe are many compared to other people in the world for sure. I think many people in Alberta have a lot of those same opportunities, so we really live in a blessed land, and we're lucky to live where we live.

When I look at the opportunities I've had and then I look at my kids, I ask: are they going to have those same opportunities? Are they going to live in a place where when they go get a job, they can be assured that (a) there is going to be a good job out there for them if they educate themselves? And (b), when they get into the workforce – say they want to try a business, or they want to save for their retirement or whatever it is, or they want to raise their family and they want to have kids of their own – are they going to be taxed to death, or are they going to live in a jurisdiction that allows them to flourish as a family and allows them to flourish as individuals and as entrepreneurs and as people? These are the things that I think a lot of us, a lot of parents – and I'm not the only parent that feels this way – think about.

3:10

This is why I have such a problem with this bill and with this government right now. They have lost their way on this issue, this issue of generational fairness. They have failed on so many accounts to save for future generations. I mean, they have not invested virtually a cent, if anything – I'm talking about from 2008 on here – in the heritage fund. They have raided the interest from that fund. They haven't replenished it when it went down in value last year even though we had a great year this year investment-wise.

They have saved nothing for our future. In fact, they have been draining the sustainability fund from where it was not so long ago at \$17 billion or 16 and a half billion dollars or whatever it was down to – I believe the number is going to come in at about \$8 billion this year. They're projecting it to be down to \$2 billion by 2013, and that's under some pretty rosy scenarios. That doesn't include the \$6 billion in debt from 2008 to 2013 on infrastructure debt that they're accumulating as well. If you took that out, the sustainability fund

would be no more, and we're back into the Getty years of debt financing. I just look at that, and that's unacceptable to me, and it's unacceptable to parents my age in most regards, I would say, because this is our future we're talking about.

I mean, look at what is going on in the United States right now. What an absolute gong show. Thankfully, we're not at that point, but here is, you know, a situation where you have the largest nation, our biggest trading partner literally spending themselves to death, where very soon they're going to be in a situation – I mean, you already see it with their currency devaluing – where, with the baby boomers retiring, their kids are going to be completely unable to pay this bill, totally unable to pay this bill. The harder they work and earn money, it's still going to be harder because the currency that they're making is going to be devaluing that whole time. They're in a huge, huge pickle.

Thankfully, and somewhat luckily in our case but also thankfully, we've had governments in the past who have been more responsible than that. Obviously, we've had the means of massive oil reserves, which has helped us, and we do not find ourselves in a position where we have massive debt. We're taking on a little bit of debt right now for sure, and it's a problem, but we are still at a point that if we set ourselves aright, if we turn the corner, if we put the proper plans in place, if we rein in spending – we're not talking about massive cuts; we're just talking about limiting spending to inflationary pressures plus growth pressures – and if we started doing that today, we would be able to pull this out of the fire. We would. We are in a position where we can do so. Past governments have put us in that position to do so. The people of Alberta have put ourselves in that position to do so.

However, in this budget and in this bill I don't see any realization of that urgency. I see more of the same. I see more spending on more social programs. I see we're spending two times more than the next closest province per capita on infrastructure. Well, infrastructure is great, Mr. Speaker, but someone has got to pay for it. What right do we have as legislators in this House today to pass that bill on to our kids for the next 10 to 20 years? That's what we're doing.

It's like we're taking out a huge mortgage on a house, and then we say, "Oh, well, we're going to give the kids a house." Well, great. What if the kids can't afford to pay the mortgage because all the baby boomers aren't paying taxes anymore? What are they going to do then? Who is going to buy their house? No one is going to buy their house. They're going to be left in a situation where they can't afford to keep up the infrastructure that has been built. They can't afford to keep the schools open that have been built and hire the teachers and the nurses and the docs and the home care workers and all those people that need to keep up the infrastructure. They won't be able to afford it because they won't have the tax base for it. It's plain and simple. That's why we can't get so far ahead of ourselves on infrastructure spending.

This year the book deficit that the government is proclaiming is \$4.7 billion, cash in, cash out. There has never been an accusation that they're doing anything illegal with their bookkeeping, but as any creative accountant can do, you can make numbers look better than they are using generally accepted accounting principles. You can do it. I would say that I think it's very clear that this year from their books we are spending \$7.6 billion more in cash going out than in receipts coming in from taxes and revenues and oil and gas revenues, et cetera.

So that's the situation we find ourselves in: a \$7.6 billion cash deficit, just an astronomical figure. And that doesn't include the AHS deficit that may be being incurred right now. I assume it's being incurred. It's been incurred. For the last however many years there have been debts in the health system, so I'm assuming there is

more debt there. The municipalities are increasing their debt loads. The postsecondary institutions are increasing their debt loads. You have the teachers' liability; we just took that on. That's not included in that deficit number, nor should it be, but that's another liability that our kids have to pay for. You know, it goes on and on and on.

I guess I would say that if we were serious about tackling this problem, we would address it in this budget and in this bill. I simply don't see it. I don't see any commitment by this government yet, not only to balancing our budget but to do so in a way that is actually proactive rather than cross your fingers and hope to God that natural gas prices increase, that drilling increases, that oil goes above a hundred again, that the dollar stays below 95, or whatever. I think the target was 95. I mean, it's all about hope. It's all about just kind of slowing down the rate of increases to about 6 per cent or 5 per cent, still way above inflation and growth. Slow it down a little bit and hope that the economy catches up.

Well, that hasn't worked for a lot of countries. It hasn't worked for Japan. They've tried that; didn't work. They're still in a stagflation situation. I don't think it's going to work for the United States either. I think they are in huge trouble. I think that in Canada, although we're in less trouble, we too have issues. We basically took on as much debt as we've paid off over the last 10 years of hard work. We've basically taken it all back on over these last couple of years and in the next couple of years.

What are we leaving to our kids? I just don't understand how we can sit here in the most richly blessed, resource-wise, province in the country and maybe even in the world in some regards . . .

An Hon. Member: We could be.

Mr. Anderson: Could be. We're right up there

. . . and just continue to kind of ignore and hope. I mean, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, when this bill comes due, when our kids have to pay for this mortgage, when they have to pay for this massive amount of infrastructure that we're putting on the line right now, when the mortgage comes due, they are going to be the taxpayers. They are going to be the ones with the four kids in school. I am going to be nearing retirement, and a lot of the folks here will be nearing retirement or retired and enjoying themselves, and they won't be paying very much tax, that's for sure.

What are we going to say to them? "Oh, sorry. Oops. You know, it's unfortunate we haven't saved anything from our oil and gas resources that are now obsolete because other technologies have occurred that we're not as reliant on." This is in 30 or 40 years from now. "We haven't saved much of anything there, but we've built all these great schools and great postsecondary institutions. I know you can't afford to hire teachers to teach in them anymore, but at least you've got the building." That's the situation we're going to find ourselves having to tell our kids in 30 or 40 years if we don't get our act together on our finances. Let's not repeat the same mistakes that have been repeated over and over again by countries and jurisdictions.

3:20

Look at Argentina, for example. Look what happened to them. The people don't know this, but a hundred years ago Argentina was actually kind of battling it out with the United States for the second largest economy on the planet. At that time England was first, and Argentina and the United States were going at it for second. They had a very prosperous economy, but they got into subsequent governments. They have rich resources. They had everything. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

I hope we can take that into consideration as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 29(2)(a) for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere if he could just finish his little history lesson on the Argentine economy and its fall from . . .

Mr. Hancock: And how the extremists ruined it.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Was it the right-wing ones or the left-wing ones?

Mr. Anderson: I am absolutely tickled pink, literally tickled pink – pardon the pun – that you would give me that opportunity. Basically, what happened is that they had governments that successively built in huge, massive entitlement programs, huge entitlement programs that slowly but surely the people could not afford to pay. They continued to raise taxes up, up, up, up again. They drove out business, couldn't afford to pay for the social programs. There became huge civil unrest. Obviously, there were a lot of different factors.

The point is that when you get into a situation where you let your spending run out of control, when you build in a group of social programs and infrastructure that you cannot afford to pay, it leads to, well, not only the downfall of economies, but it leads to civil unrest and a whole bunch of other bad things. We're not there at this point in Alberta, for sure. No one here says that we are. But if we continue down this road, that's where we're going.

Look at what is going on with our closest neighbour. These things are happening today. I have family – well, it's on my wife's side – that live in the United States right now. They're in Missouri, and it's not a happy place to be: double-digit unemployment, no real prospects, part-time work for the most part if there is anything new. I mean, it is bad news, and that is happening all over the United States right now.

We have got to get a focus here. I mean, what we should be talking about today is not approving, you know, a whack-load of spending. What we should be talking about today is: what are we going to do to get our province on track for the next 10 to 20 years, starting now, not starting in 10 years? That means controlling our spending, putting money aside and building that heritage fund so that the interest from the heritage fund can eventually decrease our reliance on oil and gas, nonrenewable revenues. Who knows? If we built it large enough, it might even decrease our reliance on income taxes, both personal and corporate, and as those came down – you want diversification? Start lowering your income and corporate taxes. That's diversification. That's where you'd get more business coming in.

Mr. Mason: Argentina is the question.

Mr. Anderson: Well, it kind of led into that.

Anyway, I think that's the discussion that we need to have. I hope that after this bill inevitably passes and this budget inevitably passes, we can start turning our focus immediately to the job of protecting the future for our kids and start thinking a little bit more about future generations rather than ourselves and the here and now.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much. I know that this hon. member often criticizes me that I don't quite understand because I don't have kids yet, but I do know this, Mr. Speaker: when I eventually do have kids, I want to raise them right here in Alberta.

This hon. member has criticized pretty much every government in North America for the amount of money that they're spending over the last couple of years. I want to know from this hon. member: if he's not happy with the United States and not happy with the Canadian federal government, with the amount of money that they're spending these days, where does he want to take his kids to raise his kids? I mean, this is what the governments are doing. This isn't something that's isolated to Alberta. That's my question to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Anderson: Well, the hon. member needs to clean his ears out. He always did have a problem listening. Never once did I say that about him not having kids. I don't know where he gets that from. I never said also that I didn't want to raise my kids in Alberta. You know, where he got that from, I don't know. What I said is that I'm worried about their future. I'm worried about what will happen if we continue down the road that we have continued down.

We've got to start setting an example, hon. member. It's our generation. It's the young guys and their kids and their grandkids that are going to get hammered with this bill. I mean, are you saying by your comments that what the United States is doing is the right way to go? Is that what you're saying?

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to rise and speak to this bill and comment a little bit about what has already been said and where we believe that things could be done a little bit better, a little bit differently going forward, comment a little bit about what has happened in the past, and maybe come to some sort of consensus in here as to what will make Alberta not only a better province a year from now, five years from now, 10 years from now but 40 years out.

I believe it was the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie who noted right off the top that the Alberta budget is a very large number nowadays: \$39 billion, I believe, is what were spending. By no small means is that a small chunk of change. A lot of that comes from royalty revenues; some of that comes from personal income tax; some of that comes from corporate income tax; some of that comes from user fees. There's a whole mix of things that we do in Alberta that goes to raise that amount of money.

There's even some of that money that has not been raised from those sources. What is on the books is \$4.3 billion in debt, and if you believe what some other people are saying in this House, the actual number in actual debt is closer to \$7 billion. I would agree with the hon. members who have spoken before that no one is accusing the government of falsifying the books, but there are ways of accounting that make things look rosier than they are. If you look at some of the debt that is acquired, it would probably be closer to \$7 billion. If you look at other debt that's in other areas, if you look at what is owed to the teachers on their liability, well, that's another \$6 billion or \$7 billion. You get the point, Mr. Speaker. We're starting to get to the point where things aren't adding up, where things are getting to the point where we're not able to live within our limits or live within the amount of money that we currently have.

If we talk about some of those things that have been talked about, let's go back to the estimates process, which – I will also follow the lead of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie – is a very interesting process and, I would agree for the most part, is a reasonable process set up to discuss various departments and to allow us to have a one-on-one conversation with the hon. minister about how the various departments are being run, what is going to happen in those departments in the coming year, talk about some of the programs

and directions that they're going to take Alberta in and what they're going to do for the Alberta people with the money they've spent.

I for one have mostly enjoyed those debates. You can learn a lot. You can get into some contentious areas. I think there's a learning process that goes on for both sides. I will say this: I don't believe it's in the best interests of the Alberta people to limit debates to three hours in certain areas. I agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that we may only need three hours for a department like Service Alberta that spends a relatively small amount of the whole Alberta budget. But is three hours reasonable to discuss I believe it was \$15 billion that we spend on health care or whatever large number it is? I don't know.

3:30

I know what other jurisdictions do. They allow the opposition members to take as much time, get as much detail out of the minister as they're able to and ask questions back and forth that, hopefully, lead to a better and more effective way for the opposition parties to understand what the government is doing. When the opposition parties understand a little better, it's helpful for us to do our job and more helpful to the Alberta people in the fact that they will know more about how their governments are running their various departments. I would suggest that maybe we have to look at those ways that other jurisdictions are currently running their debates, and maybe we could go to those types of formats. It doesn't appear that this has been an overly heavy legislative session, where we were forced to deal with a whole bunch of things on the agenda that needed to be done. This way it could have been facilitated, I think, in a very easy fashion, should we have wished to do so, and we could probably do that in the future very easily.

I also note in this little bit of a history lesson given to me by some of the members of my caucus who have been here longer and studied some of the budgetary process that if you look at the detail given, I guess, in the budgets in previous administrations here in Alberta, if we go back years ago, say, to the '70s and '80s, the type of line item you would get from a minister's department was much more detailed than it currently is. Just for those reading along, for instance, right now what we get for a line item in terms of the health budget says that X amount is being spent on health care this year in the province of Alberta. That's what we get. There's no more breakdown of where that money is being spent, what programs it's being spent on, what money is going to XYZ area of the province, what is being spent on, let's say, cancer care and, let's say, other care.

I don't know how to most effectively do that. Nevertheless, I have been told – and I am actually going to go review this stuff at some point in time – that the budgeting detail was much more complete in the good old days, if you want to call them that, where you were able then to ask your minister more detailed questions about various line items that were in their budget. At least, from the people I've talked to, that was much more helpful and led to a much easier time in understanding where money was going in the province and would maybe help both us and the government. Those are some things, hopefully, that we can work on in the future in this province.

I'd like to turn to some of the comments now that have been made on both sides on what we essentially have here, which is the either \$4.3 billion in debt we have or the \$7 billion in debt we have. Whichever number you choose to use, it appears there is a deficit, and it appears to be that if oil and gas prices stay where they are, that deficit would be a structural one. It appears that what we are doing to eliminate this structural deficit is to close our eyes and hope and pray that oil prices and natural gas prices will rise and will allow us to continue to spend in this fashion and go ahead and live in this way. Maybe, you know, I don't know if that's all that wrong. I

believe, following these energy forecasts, that that could in fact be true. But at the same time, we have to realize that budgeting on those things and even relying on those things happening is far from often what happens.

I think we here in Alberta have gone down a path that could be somewhat precarious. We have chosen, I guess, not to raise revenue although there was some speculation that that was going to occur. The means to do that would be either to raise income tax, which would have, I guess, some repercussions around. There was some talk about having an increase in liquor taxes, which got stymied. So we're not going to go down the path of raising more revenue. Fair enough. You know, in the zeitgeist of the time, or whatever it is, it is difficult for governments to do that, and I understand that.

At the same time, then, let's not kid ourselves. If we're not going to raise income tax and we merely rely on oil and gas revenues, we're caught in a box here of just simply snowing through these oil revenues. And, hey, guys, I guess we can look at ourselves and say: if they're coming out of the ground, let's snow through them as quickly as we can, keep things going as well as we can, and that's how it is. Fair enough. That looks to be like what we've done over the last 40 years. We've done that. We're essentially the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada by a long way. Has that necessarily led to a diversified economy? Not from what I read, not if you believe what the experts have said. That hasn't led to a diversification of the economy. I would disagree with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in suggesting that that is one of the things that happens. If you look here, what we have is that we're continuing to set ourselves up for snowing through these resource revenues.

Now, I think the way we have to do things in this province if we really want to get better is to, one, get on the savings plan. Let's face it. Everyone knows that, hopefully, we can save in the future. Hopefully, we can set up some sort of savings plan similar to what some oil-rich jurisdictions have, areas like Alaska, areas like Norway, and other institutions who haven't just simply spent every last dime that they brought into the coffers and said: we'll have a big party today and worry about it later. Because guess what? Despite what we think, that doesn't really work.

You know, this government has got to do one thing: realize that we have got to get on a savings plan and do it through having Albertans pay for more on their own or be honest with the people and say, "We're not going to do that; we're going to limit what we spend, only spend what we bring in and run things that way" or, in another case, simply ignore the fact and snow through the revenues. Those are the three options. We can choose to do those things. Herein going forward I think those are some of the things we need to wrestle with.

I appreciate that spending was put forward into health care and that most of our commitments to education were kept and those things. I believe those are two fundamental things that will help Albertans going forward. The two basic things a government should be involved in are making sure people are healthy and making sure people are well educated, so I applaud those budget decisions to do that. At the same time, I recognize that some other decisions were made to cut funding from the area of some of our social supports, some of the people who, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie said, may not be as likely to vote or may not be as likely to rock the boat.

We see some of the cuts to the hon. minister of housing's department, who I see over there – I had the privilege of sitting in on his debates – and some of the other ministries, I guess, indeed, that were being cut. Yes, those decisions have to be made, but those areas that got cut are a little less likely to rock the boat and got cut because of a revenue shortfall primarily made up of an oil and gas

boom-and-bust economy that we continue to ride up and down and go from the ebbs and flows. We find ourselves continually at this point seemingly every 20 years. We go from being very well off . . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Hon. member, that was some very good information that you gave there, and I was just hoping that you could expand on those last comments because I think that you were cut off, and I was riveted by that discussion.

Mr. Hehr: Well, actually I thank the hon. member for allowing me to continue, but despite him being riveted, I think I've pretty much said my piece, so I will pass it along to another member unless they would like to ask a question of me. There you go.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. Just a couple of questions or comments. This one always concerns me when I hear from some of the opposition parties talking about debt. My question to the member would be: when you write a cheque from your chequing account, just like we're drawing down our sustainability fund, and you've got cash in your chequing account, are you creating a debt? I'm having some real difficulty with this concept. We've created this fund, the sustainability fund, over several years to cover us off for times of low energy revenues, and we're now drawing down on that fund. How is that creating debt?

He commented that depending on higher energy revenues in the future is precarious and then touched on raising taxes, so I'm kind of wondering what taxes the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would suggest we raise. Is he looking at a sales tax or higher income tax?

He talked about savings plans and Norway. My understanding is that Norway has a 20 per cent sales tax, a 1 per cent net worth tax, among the highest corporate income taxes in the world, all in place to build this giant savings fund. Of course, again, you can't pass on this: they are a country. We are a province within a country that last year, I understand, transferred out something like \$20 billion into the federal system as part of our commitment to the country of Canada.

I guess, just to back up, my question would be: is drawing down on a cash surplus debt? Because I don't understand that. And I'm just wondering what sort of taxes the hon. member would suggest that we put in place if he's concerned about us counting on higher energy revenues on the future.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. member for his question. I guess, you know, if we're looking at the true definition of debt, we wouldn't. We're not sustaining a debt because we have created a sustainability fund. But at the same time, I will point out that I don't know if we've been as diligent as we could be on moving forward on our Alberta heritage savings trust fund. We've had a trust fund here that has been stagnant for years and, in fact, is worth less than it was 25 years ago. So we haven't really moved forward on that.

If we're going to snow through this sustainability fund, like some people say, in the next two years – hopefully not, you know; hopefully, we can get through this without it – then, in fact, we are going to be at square one. So I would agree that temporarily, I

guess, we do have money in the bank to cover this, but like I said, that wiggle room is getting pretty precariously thin – okay? – and I understand that.

I guess you're asking me a pretty good question there on raising revenues. Let's face it. It's never an easy thing to do, but if I were in charge, and if I had a chance to look at the books, and if I analyzed all things and found ourselves in a structural deficit, the way I would honestly do it if we needed the money is go to a progressive tax system that went over and tried to design things where the wealthy in this province, say, people making over \$200,000, would pay progressively more income tax. I believe that is the way most North American economies are running. I believe that that's where the other provinces are going. I believe that it's a fair and reasonable way to go. You know, I'm fair with standing on that principle.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 14 seconds.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater I rise today to begin debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I'm moving second reading.

These legislative changes are proposed to improve the processes involved with municipal elections. By way of background, Mr. Speaker, in a 2008 court decision the judge noted that the act is unclear about where a voter is to vote when they occupy more than one residence. A proposed amendment will clarify that when a voter has more than one residence, he or she may designate only one place of residence for the purposes of the act. In addition to the existing rules, the voter will determine one residence for the purpose of voting based on the following criteria: the residence address shown on the person's Alberta Registries identification card or Alberta driver's licence, the residence address where the person's income tax documents are addressed and delivered, or the residence address where the person's mail is normally addressed and delivered. This amendment will promote public confidence and integrity in the election process by requiring specific criteria to be followed.

There are also several additional amendments that would ensure that the new rules and requirements in the act are clear, practical, and workable. One amendment would clarify that a commercial service does not include services provided by volunteers who receive no compensation in relation to their time or services.

Another amendment relates to entirely self-funded campaigns. For these campaigns, which would be up to and including \$10,000, a bank account and public disclosure is not required by the candidate.

There's also an amendment that proposes to change the campaign contribution limit to \$5,000 per year.

Mr. Speaker, we're also proposing in this bill that the current provisions requiring that candidates' surplus trust funds be held by

the municipality will not come into effect until December 1, 2011. This amendment would allow time for candidates, municipalities, and election officials to comply with these new rules.

Another amendment I'd like to highlight is that a bank account for contributions from any person other than the candidate, like a corporation, trade union, or employee organization, is only required if the total amount of the contribution or contributions is greater than \$5,000. This amendment will avoid burdensome administrative processes for many candidates.

Lastly, there is an amendment to remove the requirement to have statements on campaigns of over \$10,000 audited.

In closing, I'd like to encourage all members to support this legislation. I look forward to the discussion that will ensue.

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

3:50

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This is an important piece of legislation because it corrects so many of the mistakes made in a private member's bill last session: Bill 203 from 2009. Although we'll reserve judgment on this until we've been through committee stage, I think that if it turns out that we're satisfied that Bill 9 takes care of the numerous problems in Bill 203, we'll probably on this side of the House be quite pleased to support it as we go on.

Certainly, on first glance it does take care of some of the problems. My hon. colleague who introduced the bill on behalf of the Member for Athabasca-Redwater outlined some of the changes that are being made. I think that those changes, on the surface at least, do make it much more possible for those people who plan to run in the municipal elections this fall to actually be able to somehow figure out how to do that and pay for it and report on it.

In initial checking around with the municipalities involved – and it tends to be the bigger municipalities, Mr. Speaker, who are most concerned about this legislation – their first glance at it is favourable as well. We will be checking further as we get deeper into debate about this. The issue, for instance, that campaign contributions do not include services provided by a volunteer who receives no compensation directly or indirectly: well, that's fairly important. I mean, the nature of a volunteer is no compensation. You know, that's a contribution in kind. That should not be something that anybody tries to put a dollar value on. That meets with the approval of people at the municipal level whom we've talked to.

Also, the point about waiting until December 1, 2011, to amend the timeline for provisions requiring that candidates' surplus trust funds be held by the municipality: it's important that that change has been made.

Now, interestingly enough, and we may get a little deeper into this at the committee stage, according to the government this amendment will allow time for affected parties to comply with the new rules. According to the people that we're talking to at the municipal level, what this should do is allow time for municipalities and organizations like the AUMA, that represent them, and the provincial government to actually consult about these new rules. In the time between when and if we pass Bill 9 in this spring session of the Legislature and a year from December, hopefully the consultation will result in some negotiations that perhaps change or clarify how the heck the candidates are going to access these trust funds before elections because that is not yet clear.

Now, I have one question that I would like to put on the record and get an answer to perhaps at the committee stage, perhaps even later on in second reading debate, on behalf of the city of Calgary.

That's the question about bank accounts. Just give me one second, if you would be so kind, Mr. Speaker, to turn to the appropriate page, which I believe is page 6 of the bill. Yes, it is. This would be section 2(1). The Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 is amended by this section. Under (2) section 3 is amended

- (a) by repealing the new section 147.2(2);
- (b) in the new section 147.3(1)
 - (i) by repealing clause (a) and substituting the following,

And I'll just read part of this into the record.

- (a) a campaign account in the name of the candidate's election campaign is opened at a financial institution for the purposes of the election campaign as soon as possible after . . .

And it continues on from there.

Well, the words in question here, Mr. Speaker, and what I want to get the question on the record about, are "a campaign account in the name of the candidate's election campaign." Now, it has been suggested to me, of course, that that's no problem for us at the provincial level. When we're running for re-election, we have constituency associations behind us, and those constituency associations have boards of directors. So when you walk into a bank branch and you say that you want to open a campaign account for the so-and-so – you know, put the name of incumbent MLA here – campaign, the bank won't have any problem with that because all the i's are dotted, the t's are crossed, and the paperwork is already in order.

At the municipal level, so it was suggested to me, this is becoming increasingly difficult to do, if not impossible, because municipal candidates don't have constituency associations behind them, don't have boards of directors, so the argument goes that they must open bank accounts in their own names rather than in the name of their campaign.

I'm suspecting here, Mr. Speaker, that the answer that I need to get back is probably just a clarification or an explanation of the wording in the bill rather than the necessity to change the bill. I suspect that the research has already been done, since this is a government bill, and that, in fact, at the municipal level it is entirely possible, and there would be protocol to follow, to open a bank account in the name of the candidate's campaign. The only thing that needs to be done is an explanation of what protocol is to be followed. The possibility exists that it will be more difficult for municipal candidates than it is for provincial or, for that matter, federal candidates, so I am going to need an explanation, a clarification around that question if I can.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Many of the proposed amendments to Bill 203 that are contained in Bill 9 I think are solid. They deal with such things as self-funded election campaigns that can include the candidate's own funds up to and including \$10,000 for the purposes of the candidate's election campaign and that that is not a campaign contribution, and the candidate is not required to open a bank account or file a disclosure statement. That applies to many, many municipal election candidates, especially in smaller jurisdictions. There's the clarification in section 147.3 that a candidate who accepts third-party donations does not have to open a bank account until and unless those contributions total in excess of \$5,000. The candidate is still required to file a disclosure statement.

There are other amendments that set out the process for when a campaign disclosure statement is required, what sort of information is required, what the timing is for filing the campaign disclosure statements, all that. These are all things, I think, that not only can

we live with, but they do go a fair distance towards clarifying and correcting some of the problems that were inherent in Bill 203.

Just to close, Mr. Speaker, as I say, depending on what others have to put on the record and what comes back in Committee of the Whole, we may be looking at challenging other aspects of this bill, or we may not. I don't know. We'll get to that in the fullness of time. As a general statement, I'd like to say that the sense that I am getting from the consultations that I've undertaken with municipal people is that we wouldn't even be here today debating Bill 9 if a proper process of consultation had been undertaken before Bill 203 appeared on the floor of the Legislature in the last session. That was Bill 203 from 2009. I'll go further and say that the same criticism has been levelled about Bill 203 this year, which has yet to begin second reading debate. That's the one about municipal franchise fees.

In both cases the feeling amongst municipal representatives is that these things, these pieces of legislation, these private members' bills, although there was consultation to a degree, kind of appeared without much consultation, without enough consultation. Now, I don't know and I'm not going to stand here and propose exactly what enough consultation looks like to municipal representatives although I will freely admit that it's much more difficult to carry out the level of consultation when you're bringing forward a piece of private member's legislation as an individual with a researcher or two helping you out than it would be if the Ministry of Municipal Affairs was undertaking legislation like these sorts of things.

4:00

I think that if we're going to be bringing forward private members' bills like Bill 203 from last year, like Bill 203 this year, perhaps we need to sit down as an Assembly and figure out a better consultative process so that private members can sit down, perhaps at predictable intervals with representatives from a cross-section of municipalities. Whether that's done through AUMA and AAMD and C or how it's done, I don't know; that's a topic for another debate. If we don't wrap our heads at this level around the notion of how we're going to carry out that consultation, I think it's a safe bet, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to continue to run into the sorts of problems that we had with a piece of private member's legislation that require, then, next year a piece of government legislation to go back and solve some of those problems.

I understand there was a unique situation this year in that Bill 203 got proclaimed before, perhaps, it should have been proclaimed, before some of the work had been done on it, and that that necessitated Bill 9. Nevertheless, we are going back and redoing some of the work that was already done, largely because it wasn't done fully and completely the first time around. Bill 9 will certainly take care of a lot of those problems, maybe all of them, but it's too bad that we sort of have to go over this same ground again.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the comments of other members of the Legislature on Bill 9 although I see from the instructions before me that those comments are supposed to come at another time. It says here at the bottom of my sheet that I am supposed to adjourn debate now, and we'll pick this up at another time. So I would move adjournment of second reading debate on Bill 9.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 13 on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Bill 13 being the Securities Amendment Act, 2010.

Bill 13 furthers the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the past five years under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. This bill includes amendments to ensure Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments that strengthen regulatory enforcement and that further harmonize the registration regime in support of the passport system.

I'd like to start with some brief comments on the federal government's move to a single federal securities regulator to put these amendments into context. Last July the federal government launched the Canadian Securities Transition Office to lead all aspects of the transition to a single federal regulator. This February Alberta filed a reference with the Alberta Court of Appeal to clarify whether the federal government has the authority to establish a federal securities regulatory regime under the Constitution. Alberta is also intervening in support of a similar reference launched in Quebec last summer. Alberta took these steps because this is such an important constitutional question.

This is not so much a disagreement on how to regulate securities. It's more about who should regulate securities, which goes straight to the heart of provincial powers under the Constitution. In fact, since 1932, the first time this issue came up, securities regulation has been a matter of provincial jurisdiction. We believe provincial securities regulation has served Alberta well and that it's in the best interests of Albertans to continue to regulate securities provincially.

Acceptance of federal authority over securities regulation under the federal trade and commerce power would have implications far beyond securities regulation. This could impact many areas that are currently considered to be provincial jurisdiction as matters of property and civil rights, including large parts of the financial services sector such as pensions, insurance, credit unions, and other provincial financial institutions. That's why Alberta is proceeding with its own reference and supporting the Quebec reference as well.

Moving on, the global financial crisis has heightened the importance of international co-operation and harmonization. Bill 13 includes amendments to assist Canada in meeting its international commitments in several areas. These areas include the adoption of a new regulatory oversight framework for credit rating organizations and the transition to international financial reporting standards, or IFRS, in Canada on January 1, 2010.

The proposed regulatory oversight framework for credit rating organizations was developed by provincial securities regulators as part of a world-wide response to the recent global financial crisis. The proposed framework is in line with international standards and is intended to strengthen the ability of provincial securities regulators to protect investors.

Under the new framework credit rating organizations must apply for designation and comply with a recently revised international code of conduct. Credit rating organizations will continue to be responsible for developing the methodologies and assumptions in the credit ratings process, but they'll have to make them publicly available to allow the market to test their validity. This will help us to better protect investors across Canada who rely on credit ratings when making investment decisions.

With the reporting on January 1, 2011, Canada will join over a hundred countries world-wide that have adopted IFRS. The proposed amendments will replace references to Canadian generally accepted accounting principles, or Canadian GAAP, with the new IFRS terms. IFRS is fast becoming the global language of account-

ing for public entities, making it easier to conduct business internationally and raise funds through easier access to global markets.

Increasingly Alberta and Canadian businesses operate and compete in a global capital market in which investors and regulators want the ability to compare financial information across borders. The move to IFRS will mean that our issuers' financial information will be readily comparable with companies in other countries. We must act now for Alberta companies to reap these benefits.

The remaining amendments are designed to ensure that our legislation continues to be harmonized, streamlined, and up to date. These include amendments to strengthen regulatory enforcement to provide a timely means of dealing with issuers that refuse to rectify, clarify, or explain misleading disclosure. This will be done by broadening the powers of the Alberta Securities Commission and its executive director to issue a cease-trade order in instances of faulty disclosure.

A further amendment will address an artificial distinction between costs associated with an investigation and those of a hearing. This will facilitate cost recovery in securities enforcement proceedings.

Finally, further amendments will support the registration reform initiative. Registration is the last significant area of securities regulation to be harmonized. These amendments will ensure that Alberta registration provisions are harmonized with registration provisions elsewhere across Canada.

Alberta was the first jurisdiction to enact many of the legislative requirements necessary to support the new registration regime that came into effect September 28, 2009. The new national registration rule streamlines, harmonizes, and modernizes registration categories and requirements across Canada, including a new indicator for when dealer registration is required and registration requirements for new classes of registration.

As a result of recent refinements to the new national registration rule, additional amendments will be required to ensure that the Alberta registration regime continues to be harmonized with other Canadian jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, these amendments will ensure that Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments and will support Alberta's continued commitment to ongoing securities regulatory reform. I encourage all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Bill 13.

I'd now like to move adjournment of the debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:10

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on behalf of the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Blckett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Transportation I'm pleased to provide some comments and move for reading Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill will amend the Traffic Safety Act. The Ministry of Transportation is not looking to change policy, just to make a correction. Section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act deals with the allocation of fines. The basic rule is that fine revenue will go to the Crown first and then be allocated. This has not changed.

Since late 2005 fine revenue has been allocated to those municipalities that pay for policing in their areas, the who-pays-for-policing model. Prior to the who-pays model fine revenue essentially went to urban municipalities for offences occurring in their areas and to some other areas such as municipal districts, Métis settlements, and

First Nation reserves if the offences occurred on their local roads. This is what we are looking to correct.

In 2004 the Highways Development and Protection Act was passed but not proclaimed until January 1 of this year. That act amended section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act, which simply updated its references. However, during the time between the Highways Development and Protection Act being passed and proclaimed, amendments to the Traffic Safety Act were made to introduce the who-pays-for-policing model. When the Highways Development and Protection Act was put forward for proclamation in late 2009, the 2005 amendment to the who-pays-for-policing model was overlooked, therefore reverting to the prior model based on geography.

This corrective amendment will reinstate the following. Where the offence occurs in an urban municipality that is required to provide its own policing for populations greater than 5,000 people, the municipality will get the fine revenue. Where peace officers are employed by a municipality, the municipality gets fine revenue from offences where those officers issued the ticket. The Ministry of Transportation is running reports to verify numbers. It appears that the impact of the unintentional change will be relatively low in the cities, larger towns, those with populations over 5,000, and urban service areas of specialized municipalities, again, with a population of over 5,000 people such as Sherwood Park and Fort McMurray. They already pay for their own policing and receive the fine revenue under either funding model, so that did not change.

Since the province has been paying the policing for smaller towns, villages, summer villages, municipal districts, Métis settlements, First Nation reserves, specialized municipalities, and the two large urban service areas I have already noted, they were not getting revenue since late 2005, excluding of course the municipalities that employ their own peace officers. We're working with Alberta Justice to determine what the impact has been.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10
Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment
Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Oberle]

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill called Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This bill attempts to widen the scope of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act following the Supreme Court finding that it is, in fact, constitutional to file a civil suit to recover some of the costs of a crime. The bill also broadens the Crown's ability to file suit to reclaim costs and to take away the profits of criminal acts so that they cannot be used to commit further criminal acts.

Like I said in an interview a couple of weeks ago when this legislation was being brought forward, I appreciate this act. I believe it is moving in the right direction and this province is moving in the right direction in regard to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. There is no doubt that one can only applaud the civil forfeiture, or the ability of the government to go after criminals who have been able to garner income, garner property, garner wealth from their criminal acts. This act allows the Crown to restrain and seize the illegal profits and property of crime and compensate Albertans victimized by criminal activity. This was

recently legitimized by our Supreme Court of Canada in Chatterjee and Ontario. Like I said, I think it's a good thing.

Another thing I'd like to talk about also is that it allows the province to compensate more and different groups who are victims of crime. It allows the government to be able to make payments to groups who are working in crime reduction, who are working with victims of crime. It also extends the ability of this government to compensate municipal governments who have found themselves having to pay for the costs of criminal activity through whatever various deeds are undertaken. It also allows them to pay out funds to people who need to pay for various things. Like I said, by at least rectifying compensation to cities, it allows them to pay for things like drug cleanups and drug house cleanups and things of that nature, that were starting to add to the costs of city budgets and without access to this fund would have impacted their ability to serve their constituents.

Like I said, this is a good act, one that I fully support. It's another opportunity for this province to stand up and say that crime doesn't pay and an ability for us to go out and take the funds back from people who have gained wealth through illegal means.

I thank the hon. minister for allowing me to speak to this, and that's enough out of me.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and support Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This bill will allow law enforcement the means to seize proceeds of crime through civil courts. Criminals are more organized than ever, and our law enforcement agencies need powerful tools to match. The roots of organized crime run deep, and we must do whatever we can to help our police enforcement agencies. Taking the assets of a drug dealer or a gang member is and should be a priority. The property seized will be put to victims' restitution and send a clear signal that not only will criminal behaviour not be stomachable, but the wealth generated will be taken away.

Mr. Speaker, as I travelled the province as chair of the safe communities task force, I heard heartfelt messages from Albertans across this province about how they felt that the criminals had more rights than the victims. To those unfamiliar with the criminal world, or the dark side, at the time of my travels there were 54 criminal groups identified, and you can bet that as I stand here on March 23, 2010, there are way more than 54.

Mr. Speaker, recommendation 8 of the safe communities task force report was to develop, enact, and enforce legislation allowing the province to seize money and property gained through the proceeds of crime and use these resources to fund victims' compensation, crime prevention, and crime programs.

4:20

Bill 10, under section 24, indicates:

44(1) Subject to the regulations, the Minister may make payments or grants from money that is paid to the Crown under this Act for any one or more of the following purposes:

- (a) compensation of victims;
- (b) programs that benefit victims;
- (c) prevention of illegal acts;
- (d) provision of compensation to the Crown or prescribed public bodies for costs incurred to protect the safety or health of persons or to protect property as a result of illegal acts;
- (e) other purposes provided for in the regulations.

My only concern with this, Mr. Speaker, is one word, and that would be “may” versus “shall.” While I’m not a lawyer, that one word makes a world of difference and gives the government the leeway on how the proceeds of crime can or should be spent.

Victims of violent crime strive to regain what was lost, either money or psychologically. Recovery from a violent crime can include time off work, meaning lost income, and in some cases victims can become disabled. Victim programs can offer help preparing for court appearances, preparing victim impact statements. The safe communities task force spoke to the importance of stable, long-term, three-year funding for community-based social agencies with proven outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 talks to what is important for Albertans. They want the bad guy to pay up and those who have suffered at their hands to be fairly compensated.

Mr. Speaker, I’m going to continue to listen to the debate on Bill 10 and hear what the rest of the members have to say about that. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to speak.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise in the House and speak to Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. I think many of us in this House have family, friends, acquaintances, people that we know, people that we care about that have been victims of crime. I think about some of the constituents that I’ve had the opportunity to consult with and talk with over the last couple of years. Of course, in Chestermere we had – what was that fellow’s name? The name escapes me right now. Anyway, he basically set up this huge Ponzi scheme, and many of my constituents in Chestermere were greatly affected.

An Hon. Member: It may have been Milowe Brost.

Mr. Anderson: Brost. That’s right. Brost was his name. Thank you, hon. minister, for that.

Many of my constituents were ripped off. It wasn’t just people in Chestermere, though. It was other people in Calgary as well. There are, obviously, lots of people who have been victims of various crimes. Just a few weeks ago I had a couple in my office who had been taken advantage of by what looks to be some sort of organized crime rip-off scheme. Then, of course, there’s violent crime. We all have constituents who have had to suffer through that, and many of us have had to kind of see the effects of that on them. Many of us have had friends and family that have seen first-hand just how damaging it is, not only financially but psychologically, to be a victim of a violent crime or a financial crime because of organized groups and the effect that that can have on people. It’s not a good thing; that’s for sure.

I commend the Justice minister for bringing this bill forward. I think it is a good piece of legislation on the whole. I have a few issues I’d like to see addressed or, I guess, a few concerns that I think it would be nice to have some explanation from her on, but in principle this is a very sound act.

What the passage of this bill would give to law enforcement is the necessary tools to seize proceeds of crime through the civil courts. Obviously, criminals have become far more sophisticated than they have ever been, and law enforcement, of course, needs the tools to match that sophistication.

Fighting crime is increasingly becoming a battle that takes place

against the financial infrastructure of the criminal underworld. Of course, proceeds of crime are not socked away neatly in a locker. You know, there’s not a big treasure chest of money and things that have been stolen anymore. Mostly, these proceeds of crime are often laundered. They’re often put into assets. You’ll see them in real estate. You’ll see them in tangible assets. It’s not the old money being hidden in the cave and then come back later and get it. It’s a very, very different type of threat that we’re working against right now. It’s become very sophisticated. Seizing these assets I think should be a priority for the government. The property seized I believe should be used to compensate victims of crime and to send a strong message that not only will the criminal behaviour not be tolerated; the wealth created, down to the last penny, will be taken back.

I had the opportunity of working with the former Solicitor General. It was a good time, and I learned a lot from him and his devotion to cracking down on organized crime. He brought forth a number of very solid, very good, effective laws and initiatives, not just laws but initiatives, that really, I think, have organized crime in this province on their heels quite a bit. So I applaud the job that he’s done, and I would say that the current Solicitor General has very, very, very large shoes to fill, literally as well as figuratively.

People who are not familiar with the criminal world may think the property in question that we’re dealing with here is just guns, drugs, flashy cars. But often the money generated by the drug or gun trade is used to invest in more mundane property that has a high volume of cash transactions, like a bar or a restaurant. This illegal money appears to come out clean, but that could not be further from the truth. In actuality, these assets stem from a tainted trail of violence and corruption.

This means that a method must be put in place for victims of crime to retrieve their property. All too often victims of crime are never made whole again. I don’t think this bill is going to make victims whole again, but it will give victims at least some small victory and some small amount of comfort and financial wherewithal to cope with the financial, psychological, and potentially physical effects of the crimes that they have had imposed upon them.

Grants under this legislation will be made available for victims of crime as well. Victims of violent crime, in particular, often struggle to recover what was lost financially and emotionally. Recovery from a violent crime can mean time off work, meaning a loss of income for extended periods, in some cases victims now paralyzed or on the brink of losing their houses.

Victims’ programs can offer help preparing for court appearances and victim impact statements, which are vital services in the pursuit of justice. They also help to provide financial benefits and the resources to seek restitution.

I do have some concerns about this bill that I would like the Justice minister to address at some point. The danger with any type of legislation, you know, when you’re giving strong powers to the Crown to enforce legislation such as this, is that there can be slip-ups. We have had a situation recently where there was a bit of a slip-up. Property is sometimes seized in haste under this type of legislation, which can create more victims in the process. So we have to be ever vigilant that we do not compromise the civil liberties of our people in the pursuit of our war against organized crime.

4:30

One issue that cropped up recently was with Patricia Thomson, who is an elderly woman in Calgary. She had her condo actually seized by the government when her son had committed a crime. He had used her address in a fraud scheme, but the property itself was never involved in the actual committing of the crime, and of course

Ms Thomson never had anything to do with it. This was a decision by Justice Alan Macleod, who rightly ordered the property returned to her. He did say that we need to guard against allowing this legislation to be used for fishing expeditions by police and law enforcement. So that's key. I think we all understand that, and I would imagine we're in agreement with that. I'd like to make sure that the Justice minister and the Solicitor General are aware that these things are happening and that they'll make sure that it's not being used in order to just basically go on a fishing expedition.

That's important for many reasons. I mean, it's important, obviously, because we don't want bad things to occur, but the assumption of innocence until guilt is proven is a very important part of our legal system. We just have to make sure that we don't find people guilty by association. So as long as we can make sure that that is taken care of, I think this bill will be worth supporting.

I think that one of the things – and I think where we would deal with it is in a bill like this – has to do with the surplus that is in the victims' fund right now. I know that there are some tricky issues that have to be dealt with there, but I really do think that we need to find a way to make sure that those funds are being used as much as possible. I don't think it makes a lot of sense to have a huge, massive surplus of these funds in place at any one given time. Having a big surplus means we're either spending too much on a program or we're not spending enough on it. We shouldn't just have it there. It's not supposed to really be a sustainability fund. I would suggest that those funds should be used to help victims or for victims' services.

I think of, you know, Airdrie, where the local MP, Blake Richards, has a hockey classic. He calls it the Wild Rose Hockey Challenge, Wild Rose as in the federal constituency. It is, indeed, wild rose country, that constituency, no doubt about that. That constituency puts on, basically, a fundraiser for victims' services. So we did that, and many hon. members in this Chamber participated, and we raised about \$10,000 for that cause. This year we want to raise \$50,000, and I would ask the hon. members from all parties that play hockey if they would sign up for that so that we could do a good turn.

But my point is that they are hurting for cash. They always are because there is just so much involved with victims' services. There are so many victims to help, and there is just never enough money to go around for those programs. I think that maybe we could look at using the surplus funds from that to help victims even more and to help the programs that assist victims. So I hope that's addressed and that we look at that.

However, on the whole, as I've said many times, I support this bill. You know, we have to make conducting illegal activities as difficult as possible, and this bill, though not perfect in my view, moves us definitely in the right direction so long as the minister ensures that those aforementioned issues are taken care of.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down.

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

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 11 Witness Security Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Drysdale]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to rise and speak in favour of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. This is legislation that will establish a provincial witness security program in Alberta in investigating and prosecuting gang-related crimes. It's increasingly difficult, especially in cases when individuals are unwilling to come forward and give evidence because they fear retaliation. Alberta's Witness Security Act will provide short-term protective services to witnesses who agree to give evidence; for example, in gang-related investigations and particularly homicides. This legislation will complement the federal witness protection program and address the needs of witnesses who require long-term protection and identity changes.

I think this is great legislation that has been brought in, and I think it comes in a timely fashion, when gangs are continuing to infiltrate Alberta. This will allow our police officers, our men and women out in the field, to use another tool to hopefully get gang members or even regular citizens to report crimes by people who are dangerous offenders, who may threaten and intimidate witnesses to criminal acts. It's my firm belief that that's probably happening out there in some cases. This legislation, hopefully, will go some way in stopping that intimidation process, allowing people to do the right thing and to come forward and give evidence on criminal endeavours throughout the province. It may also help some gang members turn over a new leaf by allowing them a way out of gang life, allowing them to be able to turn their back on criminal endeavours and start with a fresh slate.

It's good legislation. I'm glad that the Minister of Justice brought this in. I'm very impressed with the work the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti did to carry this bill forward, and I thank him for that hard work. I'm proud to support this bill in this government's continued battle against gang-related crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. I think this is a bill that's going to complement the current federal witness protection program by establishing a provincial program that's tailored to the particular needs, in my mind, of Alberta Justice. The legislation will allow the Crown and local police agencies to provide short-term security for witnesses who are feeling a little bit apprehensive about testifying in court.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, the Witness Security Act that's currently under the federal act works very well. I remember when I was in estimates with the Justice minister, and one of the questions I had put to her about this particular program was: who is going to pay for this particular act? At that time, if my memory serves me right, I recall her telling me that it was up to the police. I then said to the minister that whether the province pays for it or the police pay for it, it's still taxpayers' money. I mean, as a government we do give money to the provincial police force, and we also give money to the municipalities, who in turn will be paying for the police force. We were trying to get some costs in regard to what this would cost the province to enact this particular piece of legislation. Because it's new, I wanted to find out, you know, if the minister had any idea of how many people would be entering the witness program, if she had any idea who would be entering the witness program, to get some kind of idea of the resources that were required.

There's no doubt that we need to have something like this. I think

it is important that we do protect witnesses who've got some apprehensions or some concerns about going to court. You can tie that into gang-related activities, where you've got one gang member deciding that they want to testify against another gang member. The fear of intimidation amongst the gangs or organized crime is something that a particular individual who has decided to come forward and testify against another gang member, quite frankly, should be concerned about. One just needs to read the papers and see how they are taking care of another gang member when they don't like interference on their drugs or any of the trafficking or prostitution that they're doing. They simply decide to take them out in the streets, which, again, is a problem for the general public.

We support this bill and like what the minister is trying to do. I think she's done an admirable job in trying to do what's important to Albertans and bringing forward what needs to be done, especially when we're dealing with the issue of organized crime and gangs because, quite frankly, they're out of control in this province, and they need to be addressed.

What I think needs to be answered from the minister are some of the things that she's set up on the witness security co-ordinator, on the witness security panel. I'm sure that as we listen intently to the debate, she'll provide us with more information.

Is there going to be any collaboration between what the federal government is doing under their witness program compared to what we will be doing under our witness protection program? We have federal RCMP in this province that are here – and I don't know the exact numbers – that are dealing with some of this criminal activity, so where does the money kick in from the federal government? Where does the money kick in from the provincial government? Is there going to be a co-ordinated approach with the federal government in regard to this witness program, considering that we have specialized teams in this province who are under police jurisdiction that are going after these gangs?

I know that when I was the Solicitor General, I formed the IROC team, which is the integrated response to organized crime. I'm not sure if that's still in place, but it was hugely successful in going after these. I had the opportunity at the time to be able to see some of the takedowns, see some of their plans and actions on taking down organized crime. I know that the former Solicitor General was just as strong in carrying that forward. If I recall – and he may want to respond – I think he expanded it.

So I don't think that we need to have: this is the federal government; this is the provincial government. What is the federal government doing in their witness protection versus what the provincial government is doing in their witness program? Are we going to have a co-ordinated approach with our federal government? I think those are some questions that I would like to have answered to find out exactly what our responsibility is under provincial jurisdiction versus what the federal government's is under their federal jurisdiction. There is no question that we want to get rid of organized crime and gang-related activities, obviously, but for peace of mind for me I need to know exactly the parameters of what's going to be operated on.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down, and I'll listen to the debate. I look forward to the minister possibly in committee addressing some of those issues.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that

whenever we're talking about the justice system, we need to really take a second, close look and see: are we doing all that we need to do to ensure that the people of Alberta are protected in the best way possible? Too often when I go around speaking with Albertans, I hear the common complaint that we're always protecting the perpetrator and never the victim. Too often even witnesses fall into that category. They become the victims.

I'm pleased to speak in favour of Bill 11. We need to have the Witness Security Act, but on the balance of trying to look at justice – and I very much look at that as on the balancing scale, you know – it's supposed to be blind, and we want to make sure that we have full restitution to the victim. Here, though, with the Witness Security Act, one of my concerns is the length of time that we may have to protect a witness. We're concerned, and we need to do that, yet are we looking at strengthening or perhaps increasing the time that we need to have the victim protected from those that have perpetrated such crimes? Too often it seems like the time that the criminal has to pay isn't in comparison to the time that we need to protect someone. I think that that's another area where perhaps the dangerous offenders act – again, I realize that lots of this is federal, but we need to look at that. Why do we let someone out if, in fact, we still have to protect the witness or the victim in those areas?

Again, another concern. The added expense in order to protect a witness, over and above the expense of incarcerating an individual, is something else to look at. Really, what we want to ensure when we're protecting the witness – and, again, we do have to pay perhaps an extra price for that. We want to encourage people to come forward. It's critical in our system. Too often people are looking the other way; they don't want to be involved. They're concerned, you know, about what's going to happen to them if they get involved. This is a step in the right direction to say: "No. We as a society want to ensure that we will protect you. We want you to come forward. We want you to be a witness. We want to reduce the criminal activity and increase that by having witnesses that are willing to come forward." Too often it's very frustrating in our system that those who can and should provide witness will not come forward.

There are a few other areas. Again, I believe that this will help increase the effectiveness of police in their investigations, to have a tool now that's added to their tool box to say: well, look, you know, we can offer you this protection. Then they can give that security to people. It increases the ability of prosecutors to get the job done and put violent offenders, especially gang members, behind bars. That is an increased area that, again, we're just having reference to here in these other bills, that, you know, we're up I think from 54 to perhaps in the 80s now, one of the government members was saying. That's a concern. What are we going to do to step up the justice side in order to prevent these ongoing problems and the growth that continues to go in that direction?

I do believe that, again, this is an important bill. We're sending the message out there that we're willing to pay that price as taxpayers to improve our legal system and incarcerate those individuals that think that they can use the intimidation factor: if you do this, you know, I'm going to get you. Again, we have far too much of that going on.

4:50

There are just so many areas, though, that seem a little bit vague. What kind of investigative powers does the co-ordinator have? What resources will they have to carry it out in section 3 or section 4? That makes it a little bit questionable. Is this all that we need?

Again, with the bills that are coming forward here quickly, we don't have time to do all the research that we want to do. The government has the advantage of doing that research, but as

opposition members we need a little bit more time on some of these issues. I would hope that we just wouldn't bulldoze ahead and vote on this just because the government says: oh, we've got it right. I have a problem with that. Too often the government says that, whether it's on the royalty prices, whether it's putting a cap on tuition, whether it's looking at PDD individuals and saying that we need to reassess them. They say that they've got it right, but there isn't enough thought going into these. The question is: what happens? What's the domino effect? Are there unintended consequences?

I would hope that we just wouldn't push forward and vote on this, that we'd have a little bit more time to do some more research and investigate these things to see, "Are there some other areas that we need to prepare for?" rather than just jump into Committee of the Whole and not have the time to do that research. I would hope that we just don't go off to move on it, that we'd adjourn that debate.

I'll sit down and see if there are other members that have some concerns or some provoking thought that we should be considering on Bill 11. I thank you for being able to address this.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is important legislation. This is legislation that this government believes very strongly in. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. There is no doubt that since this government was elected, we have made it a priority to address safe communities from a number of different angles. We've dealt with awareness, education, prevention, prosecution.

We have not shied away, Mr. Speaker, not only from the prosecution, but we have also ensured that where possible within our limited provincial jurisdiction we were very aggressive in developing legislation in partnership with our stakeholders, who include members of the public, communities, victims' groups as well as the police, who are very strong partners of ours, around pieces of legislation that will have an impact in terms of stopping gang violence.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, that we have this legislation now – and I would refer hon. members back to my comments with respect to this when I introduced this bill earlier – is that we have a relationship with the police where we have a great deal of respect and trust in the work that they do. What the police have told us is that while there is an existing federal witness protection program, it is very costly, and it takes a very long time to have a person admitted into that program.

Now, Alberta is changing very quickly right now. Criminal investigations with respect to organized crime and gang violence are pieces of work that need to be responded to in a very different way than they have been in the past, Mr. Speaker. What the police have found is that they have the opportunity now to identify people who might be prepared to come forward and provide evidence with respect to gang activity and violence, but very often these people feel that they don't have 48 hours, three or four days, to think about exactly what their choices are and what their options are.

What the police have told us is that they need to have a system in place that allows them to offer protection to individuals while they make up their mind about how they're going to conduct their affairs, Mr. Speaker. They need some time where they can have some protection and think about what choices they want to make with respect to providing evidence. This is usually with respect to investigations that are taking place in the heat of the moment.

Now, the reason that this is so important is that while we have a

federal program that is funded federally and we have provincial activity that takes place right now where the police do, wherever they can, work in co-operation amongst jurisdictions in the province, between the RCMP and other municipal policing forces, and they do very often now have the opportunity to assist people by removing them to a place where they are able to have a couple of days to think about what they want to do, they have not felt that there's been a system in place that actually acknowledges what the activity is, Mr. Speaker.

If we actually look to what this legislation does, it's putting in place a process that ensures that when people decide that they want to avail themselves of the protection of the police so that they can make a decision, there's actually an agency in place and there are people in place who can look to the situation, take a look at the nature of the crime that these people may be providing evidence with respect to, ensure that the people who may be witnesses have their rights protected within the system.

You will see in the legislation – and we can get to that in Committee of the Whole, which, I would suggest to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, is the place to ask some of these questions – that people who may decide to be witnesses have the ability to opt in or opt out of the program. What we're doing is taking it from what it has been, which is a function of policing operations in the province, into a system where a witness can take a look, make a decision, enter the program, and at their choice decide when they may choose to exit the program, Mr. Speaker.

There's a lot of activity that's going on in the province right now with respect to this. Police are always co-operating with RCMP, with other federal counterparts across jurisdictions to ensure that witnesses, where possible, have some protection while they make up their mind about how to testify or whether to testify. What this does is it provides clarity and a framework that is no longer completely in control of the policing agencies, which is what the policing agencies have told us will improve the system, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek under 29(2)(a).

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister for standing up and speaking to some of our issues. I think that what's important about democracy is clarity. Some of that clarity wasn't so clear prior to us getting up and asking questions. What the minister has provided is, of course, some clarity, and we appreciate that.

A couple of things. I was madly taking notes. The minister is exactly right that in committee we have the opportunity to take this one step further and ask. Again, some of my concerns – and I addressed that in the beginning when I spoke up – are about the federal legislation. The minister spoke very passionately that the reason why the federal wasn't working was because it was costly and it was the length to get into the witness program, if I understood her correctly. I guess I'm going to ask the minister again to respond to: what is she doing at the federal level to ensure that the federal government has this ability to be tough on crime? How is she going to move that forward and say, "Look, we know it's costly, and we know it's lengthy to get in"? Quite frankly, that's inexcusable if we're trying to protect not only Canadians but Albertans.

If a province like Alberta can come up with a bill or a law that is going to, one, have police identify criminals who are prepared to come forth and, two, the ability to provide them witness protection in a very short period of time, as she indicated, if they need protection for 48 hours to think about it, I am having trouble, quite frankly,

understanding why the federal government can't do that. It makes perfect sense and perfect logic to me.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I want to on the record thank the minister for standing up and speaking very passionately about how much she believes in Bill 11, the witness protection act. I appreciate, quite frankly, her clarity, and I look forward to some more debate when we get to committee. I think it's important as an MLA to be able to answer these questions for my constituents on why we're bringing this forward. I think the debate and the discussion have been, quite frankly, in my mind, very good. I just wanted to thank the minister. I'm sure she'll provide the answers in regard to the federal. I look forward to hearing more about how the police have identified, quite frankly, criminals in this province that have said that they're prepared to come forward but that they just want that little bit of a safety zone so that they can think about whether they're going to testify against their associates.

Thank you.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd like to say, just to clarify, is that although this is legislation that is available to the police, if we are fortunate enough to pass this legislation, to protect people who may have been involved in criminal activity and are coming forward as witnesses, it is also a system that's in place for any person who may be a witness to a crime. So I wouldn't want this legislation to be characterized as legislation that's being put in place to protect only people that have been involved in criminal activity but any person who may be a witness and may need to make a decision about whether or not to provide information to the police to carry on with the investigation and the prosecution.

I know that very often people in this House and in this province have heard comment particularly with respect to the passing of federal legislation. I would carry that on to the federal witness protection program, that we do see that as these programs become bigger and are more national in focus that the legislation the federal government may want to pass with respect to a law and order agenda needs to impact more jurisdictions in more ways, that we as a provincial government are quite frustrated sometimes by the length of time it takes to do this. What we can do and what we continue to do is to urge our federal colleagues and to support them wherever possible in improving the system, passing legislation. The hon. member may know that I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity last fall to appear before a Senate committee with respect to two-for-one legislation to deal with some of these issues.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary – or Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Calgary? Oh, man.

Mrs. Forsyth: Hey. What's wrong with Calgary?

Mr. Anderson: Nothing is wrong with Calgary. I just don't want you guys getting any ideas that you're going to be annexing us or anything like that.

It's an honour to stand and speak in favour of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. I also want to commend the Justice minister for bringing this legislation forward as well as the Solicitor General with Bill 10. I think that this government overall has done a very good job on the Justice file. I think we're moving in the right direction,

and I think that's something that as opposition we will continue to support.

We're going to have some differences on Bill 12, and we'll discuss those because as with anything, we can go overboard, but Bill 11, for sure, is a solid bill. Obviously, for the benefit of my constituents I'd like to speak to why I support this bill and maybe bring some interesting factoids to their attention. This act will complement the current federal witness protection program, which is interesting because the federal program was actually put in place in 1996. Doing research on this bill, I was just amazed that it took until 1996 to have a federal witness protection act, which is really mind-blowing. The one in the United States was brought in in 1970. It took 26 more years to bring in one in Canada. I don't know if that's because we're more safe up here from organized crime or if it's because we're a little bit naive or because our justice system was lacking through the '80s and '90s. I'm not sure. It's probably a combination of things.

It is good to see Alberta take a leadership role in this. You know, everyone has heard these stories. You hear them in the States from time to time where people will be witness to a crime, and they'll just stand around, and they'll not do anything about it, or they're afraid to talk with police. You see this all the time in some of the larger centres in the United States. I'm sure it happens here, too, where people essentially will be afraid. I mean, they will be absolutely petrified to come forward because they know that they will be marked men and women if they were to do that. What happens is that people's hearts almost become cold to some of the crime in those areas. It's almost a survival tool because they have to kind of become callous and cold to witnessing crime because it might drive them crazy if they care too much about it. So they kind of have to compartmentalize it and stick it on the shelf because if they were to come forward, they would die. That's often how it happens.

Even though we have a witness protection program in Canada and the United States, it doesn't mean that it gets used a lot. I mean, it's an expensive program. There are still situations where people are still afraid to come forward, so I'm happy to see that we're taking a leadership role in this. I will say, too, that there are all types of examples in the United States with regard to this program and how effective it's been. Obviously, our program here in Alberta is going to be a little bit different if this law passes than the one in the United States because we have our federal legislation.

Basically, the witness protection program came out of essentially trying to deal with the Mob in the United States, organized crime down there. Everyone has seen, of course, *The Godfather* movies and some of the things that happen there, where basically the government needed to prosecute these criminals, but they just couldn't find people willing to testify against the Mob. Surprise, surprise. You know, you have that classic scene in one of those movies where there's a guy who wakes up, and there's a horse head in his bed with him. It's scary, very scary stuff. That's why they introduced legislation, because of the intimidation that was going on and, of course, the killing that was going on of witnesses who wanted to leave the Mob and otherwise would leave the Mob, and they wouldn't testify against their former bosses because they weren't willing to take the risk.

Since 1970 7,500 witnesses and more than 9,500 witnesses' family members have entered this program and have been protected and relocated and given new identities via the U.S. Marshals Service. It has had a lot of effect, obviously, for those 7,500 people and their 9,500 family members because I don't doubt that many of those individuals would not have survived had they testified against their former bosses or would never have left and would have continued on in the crime. So this is an absolutely essential piece of Justice infrastructure that we need.

There is a problem we have in Canada, and it would be nice to see the Justice minister speak to this because she probably more than anyone else here would understand it because of the circles that she travels in with other Justice ministers around the country. There was a recent Italian mobster named Francesco Di Carlo. He admitted to the media several months ago that Canada was essentially known in the organized crime community as a bit of a safe haven for organized criminals. I mean, obviously, I don't know if we want to take the word of an organized criminal on whether that, in fact, is true. It does seem, though, that organized criminals are taking advantage of our lax laws in Canada on organized crime.

Obviously, a lot of this is not under the purview of the provincial Justice minister, so I'm not laying blame, but I really am curious to see what we're doing to alter some of this federal legislation. I really do believe that it needs to be stronger, that we do need some very low- or no-tolerance policies for organized crime. A lot of these guys we just kind of let run around. I mean, you look at the Hells Angels, you look at some of these other groups, and essentially they're out there, and they're kind of doing their thing.

5:10

We've tied up our police force and our justice system so much and made it so difficult to get prosecutions on some of these individuals or, once we prosecute them, to keep them in jail that it really has brought our justice system into a bit of disrepute. I wonder what the reasons are for that. Is it because our judges are too lax in their sentencing? Is it because our laws need more mandatory minimums and need to be tougher? Is it because we're not putting enough police resources into it? Is it because we're tying their hands with too much procedure and too many loopholes that essentially allow these criminals to walk free early?

The Justice minister talked earlier about the two-for-one sentencing and how that has been a big problem where people will get credit for time served. She has obviously talked a lot about addressing that issue. It would be nice to have a good discussion about some of the things that this government is doing to move that file forward, understanding, of course, the limits that they have. It being mostly a federal jurisdiction, there is very little that we can do as a province, but there obviously are some things we can do.

I wonder if it would be in our interest for the Justice minister to maybe put forth a kind of a plan or a blueprint for the type of justice system that we would like to see in Canada, just, you know, in your spare time, Minister. I know you have so much time. You put something together to that effect and then decide how we would like to arrive at this justice system. So figure out what type of provincial laws need to be changed, figure out what federal laws need to be changed, and really proactively pressure our federal MPs to change those laws.

I mean, maybe we could be a little bit more proactive with the type of justice system that we want to see in Alberta even though we're not in complete control of our destiny on that issue. I would like to see that. Hopefully, if we had a good enough kind of master plan of what we want our justice system to look like in the end, some of the reforms we would like to see, and we got other provinces, B.C. and Saskatchewan to start, to buy into this, it could be quite a powerful thing.

I know that the Justice minister is always talking about working with other jurisdictions. The previous Solicitor General talked about that as well, about working with other governments in pursuit of the same goals on defeating organized crime, gang violence, all those types of things. I think that would be good, but it would be nice to kind of have a blueprint for what success looks like. I mean, we have some recommendations from task forces on some of the things we

need to do, but I don't know if we really know what our goal is. Do we have any goals? What is it going to look like when we come out the other end? What are we trying to achieve? We seem to kind of sometimes run around and put out fires rather than have a proactive approach.

I'm assuming the safe communities task force fits into that. I'm assuming the Safe Communities Secretariat fits in there, but again I don't think the average Albertan, let alone the average member in this Assembly, really knows what the end goal looks like for the justice system in Alberta. Obviously, this is probably a piece of what the solution is, but I think that, again, we need to figure out what the master plan is.

Those are some of the things that I'd like to see answered by the Justice minister either now or in Committee of the Whole. Other good things about other – and I'll bring some of these questions up in Committee of the Whole, so I won't read them out here.

I do want to end by saying again that I absolutely support this legislation. I support the intent behind the legislation. I think that the Justice minister and the former Solicitor General have done an excellent job over the last two years in bringing forth piece of legislation after piece of legislation that is making our communities safer. Again, congratulations to them.

Those are my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, does any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to speak on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak very briefly to Bill 11. I think that the goals of the legislation are laudable. The protection of witnesses and particularly those who witness crimes committed by gangs is very important as intimidation is often the cause of people failing to testify and thereby preventing convictions of people who are criminals and dangerous people often as well. Strengthening the witness protection is an excellent goal, and I think that the bill does a relatively good job of doing that. This is, I think, something that is needed.

I note, Mr. Speaker, that previously a similar type of legislation was introduced in Manitoba and I believe also in Saskatchewan. I certainly think that there is a growing body of crime-fighting legislation in this province that was pioneered particularly in the province of Manitoba. Of course, the NDP government there has been a leader in this country in developing stronger legislation to increase community safety, to ensure that the police can do a good job, and to make sure that criminals are constrained from carrying out their activities with impunity. Because of the effectiveness of the program in Manitoba and probably, I think, in Saskatchewan as well, I think that this piece of legislation is a good one, and we're prepared to give it our support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 12 Body Armour Control Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Quest]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a great

pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act. On balance this is a good bill that looks to fight some of the criminal element that has been moving into Alberta. It's meant primarily to be directed towards gang members and individuals who are looking to, I guess, seemingly do nefarious deeds across this province with impunity and feel protected from doing their various deeds by wearing this body armour. What we've learned from police officers is that this has become a growing gang symbol that both identifies and serves to be almost a little bit of a machismo sort of thing. They wear it to strut around and throw their nose up at authority and to almost enhance their reputations in the community.

5:20

I also say that on balance it is a good thing because there have been some rumblings from some civil libertarian groups as well as some elements of the criminal defence bar that suggest that this bill is too much of an infringement on civil liberties in the fact that people should have a choice to purchase this body armour, that they should be allowed to buy it, and it should be within their own purview to purchase this stuff and to wear it to protect themselves. I understand those arguments. Still, on balance I believe this bill does more to protect society than it does to erode our civil liberties. In this instance I am not too worried that this is going to do anything to bring down the democratic state that exists here in Canada. You know, one never knows. One has to be on the lookout for encroaching on that civil liberty. But in this case I do not believe that we have that much to worry about.

You know, this bill also gives police another opportunity, another investigative tool. If they find an individual who has this stuff on and they don't meet one of the exemptions, that leads them to believe that this is illegal. They can continue their investigations. They can use this tool as a further means to isolate known gang associates from their communities.

I appreciate this bill and the object of the legislation. It's going to make it more difficult for gang members and other criminals to possess and obtain this body armour. The legislation will allow police to perform search and seizure activities when they believe there will be probable cause that an individual is in possession of this body armour. That's a good thing.

The legislation will still allow individuals who have a professional reason for possessing body armour to have and obtain it. We're talking about some of our security guards, some of our police forces, some of the other individuals who are involved in dangerous activities. I think it allows them a legitimate purpose to have the body armour. I think that's a good thing that we can do.

There was a sense when seemingly jumping to the question phase of this legislation a little earlier – you know, I think I understand why it is there, but there is an exemption for individuals who, merely by the factor of owning a gun permit, are given an ability to, I guess, possess this body armour. Although I understand, I go: there are other ways to identify a gang member a lot of times, criminal records and all those sorts of things here. For a person to order a firearm, a check has to go through many of these things that would weed out gang members. It just seemed to me to be a little bit of a one-off just to have that point-blank exemption.

If there were some of those more valid reasons – I understand people who are hunting. I've heard now from hunters who want this when they're out hunting. Maybe it's the Dick Cheney rule. You know, when you're going out, swinging a bunch of wild turkeys with your buddy, it's better to have body armour on so you don't get shot in the behind. Maybe this is good. Maybe that's why we have the Dick Cheney amendment here. Maybe that's what it is: to protect our hunters from themselves. It was just sort of like some banter

going around in the office, you know. But on the whole if I get some clarification on that, I think it's good legislation.

Actually, I thought the three bills that were brought in here – bills 10, 11, and 12 – were moving in the right direction. I think it keeps us on the offensive on some of these things. The minister is working, seemingly bringing in a lot of things that the police want, which is a good thing. If we can make some changes to the way policing is done and work with the police officers to eradicate or try and limit gangs and crime in our society, I think that is a good thing.

So I'll leave that one question out there. It's a fairly good bill. It was an honour for me to speak on it today, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to add a few comments. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

I actually received a call a couple of weeks ago on this topic from a constituent of mine who lives not far from me. This person was a gun owner, and I fully support the rights of responsible gun owners. He had indicated that he was worried that he would not have access to this. I took some minutes to explain to him what the problems were that we were having with gangs, in particular in the city of Calgary, how these gangs would actually go and wear this body armour almost as a way of taunting other people, almost as a way of status.

I also explained to him that the legislation in British Columbia was very similar, if not identical. He actually understood exactly where I was coming from on this issue. I think that it's incumbent upon all members to go and explain that we're not trying to go and deny someone his civil liberties, as the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* has talked about. Rather, we are actually trying to reasonably curtail the activities of organized crime, the activities of gangs. This is not the be-all and end-all, Mr. Speaker; rather, it is a piece of the puzzle.

I want to just talk briefly about a particular situation that happened in my constituency. We all know of the murder of Keni Su'a and several other people at a restaurant on 94th Avenue and Macleod that happened on January 1, 2009. That really opened up my eyes to the fact that gang activity is not just a downtown issue like in the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*'s constituency. It's a matter that attracts all attention and demands vigilance throughout all facets of our province, not just in these downtown areas.

I represent a suburban constituency, and we had murders right there, just blocks from where I live. It really shakes a person up, specifically, what's going on. This is a piece of the puzzle, and I wanted to commend the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for introducing this, but I also want to issue a challenge. Where that gang shooting happened on 94th and Macleod is on the border between the constituency of mine and the Member for Calgary-*Glenmore*. I appreciate a lot of his comments about crime and justice, many of which I completely endorse.

This is something, clearly, that goes beyond party lines. I am agreeing with a member of the Liberal caucus on this as well, so I'm hoping that I can work with the Member for Calgary-*Glenmore* just toe to toe on this issue and to do what we can to stamp out gang activity in the city of Calgary and in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today in the House somebody I've known most of my life, somebody that was my political adviser in high school as I ran for prime minister of Lester B. Pearson high school. I must say that we succeeded, Mr. Speaker. Our party was the new world order based on the world wrestling federation, at that time the most popular movement. That adviser is none other than Robby "Rabbit" Ravinder Hundal. I would ask Robby to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislature.

The Acting Speaker: Next speaker. Anyone wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 12

Body Armour Control Act

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, right after I just said all these nice things about the Justice minister and all the great legislation that she's bringing forth, I'm going to say that I totally disagree with this next bill, Bill 12, the body armour act.

You know, it's a difficult balance that you need to create in society between fighting crime and maintaining civil liberties. There's a very delicate balance, and you can really get it out of whack if you start going down a certain track. This bill does that. I know that, obviously, the police are asking for this, and I respect that position. I respect that they want that. The police also asked for the gun registry. They're in favour of that as well. We always want to make sure we're giving the police, our men and women in uniform, the tools that they need to do their job and to keep us safe, but we can go over the line, and this bill takes us over that line, in my view.

5:30

We just fought as a province for years along with other governments to repeal the long gun registry, and the reason we did that is because we found that it was a completely ineffective tool for keeping guns out of the hands of criminals. All it did is implement a very onerous and wasteful bureaucracy on your average farmer or gun owner. There was just no reason for it. It didn't take guns out of the hands of criminals, so it was a huge expense and for nothing in return.

This bill essentially does the same thing as the gun registry. You cannot own body armour unless you have a permit. [interjection] You know, it's funny, the Education minister making light: who wears body armour? I actually know a couple of women that do when they go for walks. It's actually true. It's not Kevlar, but it's a stab-proof vest that they use. They're worried, of course, of being taken advantage of and being stabbed. These are people I know, so there are people that do it. If the Minister of Education doesn't know anyone, I guess that's the way it is, but some people do use this.

I guess my point is that, you know, we were so against the gun registry here because of how unnecessary it was and because it did infringe on our civil liberties and the rights of gun owners. We were against that, and that's actually a weapon you can use to hurt somebody, a gun. I think that's pretty clear. We're going to,

essentially, make it illegal to own body armour, which you cannot use as a weapon. What are you going to do? Throw the body armour at somebody? No. It's not a weapon. It's a purely defensive piece of equipment that you can use.

This, I believe, is an infringement on our civil liberties. This goes too far. We have the right in our society to protect ourselves; that simple. In Canada we have a little bit of a different way of doing it than the United States, where they've kind of taken it to the nth degree. We have bans on handguns, and that's good. We have these other things, but there is still a line there. We still have civil liberties here with regard to the ability to protect ourselves.

Now, people say: oh, well, criminals go into bars or gangs go into bars, and they wear these vests, and that just intimidates people. Well, okay. If somebody is caught with a vest while they're involved in a crime, when they're assaulting somebody, when they're involved in a drive-by shooting or whatever it is, or they start a bar fight and they have this on, sure. Put a penalty on that. Increase their sentence by two years. Make it something that aggravates the offence, whatever. You can do that. But you don't ban protective vests from the average citizen. It goes way, way, way over the line.

What are we going to? Just because someone gets intimidated by something, we're going to ban it? Like, the Minister of Infrastructure has got that big beard on, and that's kind of intimidating. Are we going to ban big beards in bars? I mean, come on. It's silly. You know, somebody comes in with a shirt hiked up here, and they're showing off their muscles to everybody. That intimidates somebody, so we're going to ban that? I mean, it's just juvenile to do this.

Ms Pastoor: That sounds nice.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. That would be a good thing. We would never want to ban that – right? – hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Anyway, I do think it is absolutely going over. You know, you're taking a sledgehammer to this when all you need is a fly swatter. It just doesn't make sense. I think that this government needs to think that through a little bit. There are people that this does affect. These are not the types of people that are going to come and march on the Legislature Grounds because some of them are embarrassed that they use the stuff, that they use the equipment, the protection. Some of the people have privacy issues. They don't want to say: I wear a knife vest out. This isn't as small a number of people as individuals in this Assembly might think. So that would be one thing.

In fact, you know, it's funny. The person who invented Kevlar was actually a pizza delivery man, if you can believe it, by the name of Richard Davis in the 1970s. While delivering pizza, unfortunately, tragically – well, it was good that he survived this – he was attacked, and he ended up killing his attackers. There were three of them. He actually had a gun with him and ended up shooting them. I don't know. For whatever reason it was – I would assume because he thought that that was not a very good thing to have to be forced to do – one of his solutions to that was establishing a company called Second Chance. He started it out of his garage in the 1970s, and since then he's manufactured these vests, and they've saved thousands of lives of police officers and other people through the years. The very inventor of this invention did it because he was attacked in a public setting randomly, so he went about and did that.

You know, there are some pretty rough areas in some places in Calgary, in certain areas. If somebody wants to go for a walk and walk their dog and they're worried because they think they might be targeted for whatever reason, should they not be able to wear that type of protection? What's wrong with it? There's nothing wrong

with it, and I think that to ban it – I mean, it's like the gun registry, too. Did the gun registry cause criminals not to have guns? Do you think that a gang member is going to go and register his Kevlar vest? I mean, come on. He's not going to register his Kevlar vest. Why would he do that? [interjection] Exactly. He's not going to do it, so this is just a total bureaucratic waste of time.

An Hon. Member: Soft on crime.

Mr. Anderson: That's right, hon. member. I am soft on crime. Exactly. That makes a lot of sense.

You know, it absolutely goes beyond the line. Let's start bringing things back to where we are discussing what we should be doing that's really going to stop crime. For example, why don't we start talking about – oh, I don't know – mandatory minimum sentences for some of our offences in this country? We're talking about it. Well, let's actually do something about it, okay?

An Hon. Member: That's federal law.

Mr. Anderson: No, it's not all federal. There are mandatory minimum sentences we could do here for certain offences. I'm thinking of drinking and driving, things like that. After you do it five times, maybe you should get some kind of minimum mandatory sentence for that, okay? There are things that we can do. [interjection] Again, the Education minister doesn't seem to know how serious drinking and driving is, which is a little alarming. We'll definitely have to talk about that.

Going back to the subject matter of the bill. I'm assuming that's why you're on the edge of your seat. I think that we've got to realize that self-defence is a basic human right, and having a defensive piece of equipment – I mean, what are we going to do? What if people start wearing helmets into bars? Are we going to say that you can't wear a helmet because it protects you in a fight? There are so many different things that you could say that you could apply this law to on other pieces of equipment. It doesn't do the job. It will do nothing to help the safety of Albertans, nothing whatsoever. All it will do is waste money, and it will cause ordinary citizens to have to go through getting a permit and all that sort of thing: do I fall under one of these exemptions, blah, blah, blah? That's all it's going to do. It's just going to annoy people, and it's going to cost money.

Sometimes I feel I have to wear a Kevlar vest after being in here every day. I mean, it's tough. Sometimes I'm worried. So we all fear for our safety once in a while, Mr. Speaker, and we've got to make sure that we protect that basic human right.

5:40

The money, too. Setting up any kind of permit system costs money. I don't know how much this permit system will cost. If government is involved in it, I'm sure it'll cost a lot. Whether it's \$100,000 or \$1 million or \$2 million or \$3 million, let's spend it on more police officers, or let's increase the number of ICE teams that we have battling child pornography. I mean, let's use the money in a way that's actually going to help protect people, that's actually going to help protect children and real individuals. You know what this is? This is a let's do something to look like we're doing something law. That's what it is. You know: we've got to bring in a law and order agenda; we've got to do something that is impressive. So they bring this in, and it's just painful to watch.

Mr. Hancock: It's painful to listen to.

Mr. Anderson: Well, you can leave. You're welcome to leave,

Minister of Education. There's nothing keeping you here if you don't like what you're hearing.

What I would say, too, going back to that earlier argument that was yelled across the way, is that we can actually spend this money improving our laws here; for example, drinking and driving. Yeah, it's a Criminal Code offence. It's also an offence under our traffic laws. That's where you could actually do something provincially with mandatory rules and requirements to cause people to rethink some of their actions. Doing this just absolutely will have no effect whatsoever.

You know, I would challenge. I would say: can somebody explain to me on that side of the House how this is any different from the gun registry? Just what's the difference other than with one you can shoot someone and kill them, and the other one is a purely defensive piece of equipment? What is the difference between asking someone to register their long gun and asking them to register their defensive vest? Are you in favour of the long gun registry? Come on, Minister. You know you're not. So why on earth would you be in favour of a bill like this, which is essentially setting up a long gun registry for safety vests in Alberta? There's no reason for this whatsoever.

I look forward to some of the questions. I know that the Minister of Education is probably raring to go with some questions. But I absolutely will be voting against this bill. I think it's an infringement against civil liberties, and I think that there's no reason why the average person shouldn't be able to protect themselves using a stab vest or bulletproof vest or anything like that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it funny that earlier on in the afternoon this member got up and was so concerned about what a bad province this was going to be if the government just kept spending money and money and money. I'm just wondering because, you know, it's going to have a huge impact on the future of his children. I'm just wondering if he's less concerned about the amount of money that the government is spending as opposed to some of the stuff that's happening on our streets as far as gangs that are shooting each other.

I'm not sure this member honestly understands why these members wear these bulletproof vests. They don't wear them to intimidate anybody. I don't think a bulletproof vest intimidates anybody. They wear them because they go out there and they shoot and spray bullets everywhere in an attempt to kill each other. Unfortunately, we see a number of examples where innocent bystanders are hurt. I'm wondering: how does this jive? You're talking about wanting to make Alberta a better place for your kids. Tell me: wouldn't this make Alberta a better place for your kids to have this in place so that these guys couldn't run around spraying bullets everywhere and killing innocent people?

Mr. Anderson: That was probably one of the most illogical arguments I've ever heard in my life, but I will attempt to address it. Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we should have . . .

Bill 15
Appropriation Act, 2010
(continued)

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[The voice vote indicated the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Goudreau	Ouellette
Benito	Groeneveld	Quest
Bhullar	Hancock	Sandhu
Blackett	Horne	Sarich
Campbell	Jablonski	Sherman
Denis	Johnston	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Lindsay	Vandermeer
Elniski	McFarland	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Olson	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Boutilier	Mason	Taylor
Forsyth		

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 12
Body Armour Control Act
(continued)

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Anderson speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, there are three minutes left under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Anderson: I notice that the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill is talking a lot about kids lately. He brings them up a lot. I'm wondering if there's something on his mind. He keeps bringing those things up.

You know, what he has to understand is that correlation is not causation. I think it's funny that he would say that outlawing, essentially, or permitting bulletproof vests is going to somehow stop people from spraying bullets at each other in gangs. I mean, I don't understand how on earth he makes the leap there.

You know, hopefully, one day if I want to have more kids, I'll have a daughter. If that daughter was going out for a jog or out for a walk and she wanted to wear a stab vest or something like that, how would it make it better for me to make that more difficult for her to get that vest? I don't understand what the correlation could possibly be between those two, between making Alberta safer and effectively making a vest registry. I'm completely clueless.

Obviously, the hon. member would like to see the gun registry kept in place because, surely, that would help with guns. I mean, those are exactly the same arguments that you hear from the Bloc Québécois and the Liberals. You hear those exact same arguments in favour of the gun registry that you're hearing in favour of this bill. The only difference is that a vest isn't dangerous to anybody, and a gun is. That's the only difference between the two. I think that should answer the question regarding that. We should just be increasing the overall penalties that we impose on people for using those in a crime. That's where we should be focusing our efforts.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock, and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	597, 626
Members' Statements	
Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	598
International Purple Day	598
REAP Calgary	598
Barons Centennial	598
Oil Sands Image	599
Helping Hands of Hope	599
Oral Question Period	
Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors	599
Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability	600
High-intensity Residential Fires	600
Funding for Special-needs Foster Children	601
Oil and Gas Royalties	601
Provincial Deficit	602
Court Service Caseloads	602
Integrated Land Management	602
Distracted Driving	603
Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray	603
Cancer Services	604
Cultural Competency Initiatives	604
Foster Care System	605
Online Driver Licensing	605
Property Taxes	606
U of A Sustainable Development Campus	606
Harmonization of Oil and Gas Royalties	607
Chronic Wasting Disease	607
Oil Sands Image	607
Tabling Returns and Reports	608
Tablings to the Clerk	608
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010	608, 627
Division	628
Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010	615
Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010	616
Bill 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010	617
Bill 11 Witness Security Act	620
Bill 12 Body Armour Control Act	624, 626, 628

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