



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 15, 2010

Issue 28

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 15, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce to you today officers of the Salvation Army in Alberta. These men and women represent the front-line leadership of an organization that has given unstinting care, compassion, and spiritual guidance in Alberta since 1883. Their commitment is underpinned by a deep and abiding faith, yet they serve all with utter and absolute dispassion and complete inclusion regardless of religion, creed, or ethnic background. Over the years the Salvation Army has supported individual members, events here at the Legislature and in constituencies across our province, and, indeed, rendered assistance beyond our borders. We are grateful to them for all that they do for those in need.

I'll ask them to please rise as I call out their names, and the recognition should be given after I introduce all. In the Speaker's gallery today: Major Fred Waters, divisional commander for Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Wendy Waters, divisional director of women's ministries and area commander for Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Sandra Stokes, area commander, Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Roy Langer, divisional emergency disaster services director; Captain Pam Goodyear, divisional secretary for public relations and development; Captain Bram Pearce, divisional youth secretary; Captain Gordon Taylor, corps officer and community services director from Grande Prairie; Captain Randy Hale, corps officer and community services director from Fort McMurray; Captain Mark Stanley, executive director of the Salvation Army's Addictions and Residential Centre here in Edmonton; Major Brian Beveridge, corps officer and community services director from Lethbridge; Major Edith Beveridge, corps officer and community services director from Lethbridge; Ms Karen Livick, chief operating officer for Salvation Army community services from Calgary; Mrs. Karen Diaper, communications coordinator and government relations liaison; Mr. David Dickinson, executive director, Salvation Army community and family services organization here in Edmonton; Mrs. Louise Charach, Edmonton Citizens Advisory Board chairman.

Seated in the public gallery are members of the Salvation Army advisory board: Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Tom Dixon, Mr. James Tingley, Mr. Don Jones, Ms Emmy Mills, Ms Joan Rossall. If they would rise as well, please.

Also in the public gallery are hard-working staff of the Salvation Army: Major Sandy Langer, Major Bev Call, Mrs. Darlene Burton, Major Harold Aitkenhead, Major Christine Aitkenhead, Mrs. Karen Coley, and Ms Brandie Howey.

I'd like all of our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of our distinguished members of the Alberta Legislature.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great group of visitors from Alexander First Nation in my constituency. They are representing Alexander skills link, which is a great tie to the future of this province and to the future of aboriginal peoples. They are accompanied by group leaders Ms Sarah Catley, Mr. Colby Arcand, Mrs. Marsha Arcand, and Mrs. Dale Morin. They are, I believe, seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once in a very long while you find a staff member who not only does their job efficiently and has a smile for everyone but also becomes a friend. I've been very fortunate in finding just such a person. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a dedicated member of my office, Ms Deb Young. Deb has been a valued member of this government for nearly 30 years. Deb followed in her mother's and father's footsteps: Allie Dancey, who worked for the departments of Transportation and Agriculture, and Fred Dancy, who worked with the department of Treasury. Deb has been a valued member of my Legislature office team since I was appointed minister. I know that many members in the Assembly know Deb, and I know that they will join me today in wishing her the very best as she has announced that she will be retiring from government. I want to take a moment to recognize Deb's efforts on behalf of not only myself but the government of Alberta for the past 30 years. Every day Deb has demonstrated wisdom, strength, dedication, and commitment. I know that our office will not be the same without her, and we will miss her. Deb is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask Deb to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a smart and talented young constituent and her family. Kaitlyn Graham was the recipient of the ATCO Olympic challenge award. Alberta students from grades 4 to 12 were invited to submit a composition in their own words on how they will pursue leadership and strive for excellence in sports, arts, culture, education, or community involvement. Two of the award recipients went to the Olympics, but Kaitlyn won the best prize, a laptop computer. In her future she plans to be an animal doctor, a veterinarian. After that, I've asked her to consider a career in politics, so she plans to join me in my constituency office to be a junior MLA on some Fridays to see what we do in our jobs. Kaitlyn is joined here today by her family: her father, Garnet; her mother, Sharon; and her brother, Kelton. They're seated in the members' gallery above, and I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly very special representatives from the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Edmonton branch, and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch. As indicated earlier this week in my private member's statement, these two organizations are commemorating the 60th anniversary for the League of Ukrainian Canadians and the 55th anniversary for the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branches. There is no denying that the dedication, commitment, and numerous achievements gained by

these two organizations over the decades were and will remain very extraordinarily meaningful. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all those individuals from the past, present, and into the future who have truly made a difference for the Ukrainians and the Ukrainian community within Edmonton, our province, and across the globe.

I would now ask my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, that as I mention your name, please remain standing. Representing the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Edmonton branch, are Jaroslaw Szewczuk, past president and political and educational co-ordinator; Hryhoriy Prockiwi, original organization member; Stefan Romaniuk, original organization member; Orest Cyncar, original organization member. An individual, Mr. Peter Dackiw, who has served 21 years as president of LUC, could not join us today, but special recognition for him is well deserved today. Representing the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch, we have Ivanna Szewczuk, president; Natalia Talanchuk, vice-president, president for 18 years, and original organization member; Vera Kindzersky, treasurer; and Lidia Simcisin, board member.

I would ask that the Assembly please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

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 two good friends from the United Cabbies Association of Edmonton and constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie, seated in the members' gallery, beginning with Balraj Manhas, who is the president of the association. Joining him is Gurdip Waraich. They are here today to talk to a number of our colleagues about issues with the cabbie association. I'd like them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction, once again it's an honour and privilege for me to rise to introduce to you and through you a good friend, Mr. Avtar Kang, from the constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Joining him today are two individuals. Visiting the first time in Edmonton from India are Mr. Prem Singh Aujla and Mr. Hari Singh Aujla. I would ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people from the Realtors Community Foundation: Mr. Curtis Stasiuk, the president of the organization, and my good friend, constituent, and co-conspirator, Ms Jill Didow, the executive director. The Alberta Realtors Community Foundation donated \$394,000 to a wide variety of lesser known organizations last year. This money was largely raised as a result of the contributions and efforts of some 3,200 Alberta realtors. They are a largely unsung organization. I don't see them in the members' gallery; they must be in the public. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a few guests from the seventh floor of the Leg. Annex: my leg. assistant,

Marshall Thiessen; another leg. assistant, Tracy Arnell, who works very hard for the members for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and also Red Deer-South; and a very special guest visiting the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, Monty the bear from Red Deer Sunrise Rotary. Monty is up here today enjoying a tour of the Legislature and spending time with his MLA. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Calgary Chinatown Centenary

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Starting this summer, Calgary Chinatown will start to celebrate its centenary. Chinese immigration to Canada began in the mid-1800s. Many came to work on the unnerving western leg of the Canadian Pacific railway and started settling in Calgary once the tracks were finished. The first Chinatown was on the eastern edge of town, close to the railroad track. The second one was near 10th Avenue and 1st Street S.W. as the community grew in size. Then the community was evicted when property values surged in the area about a decade later. These families had to find a new location as they were not welcome to live in other established communities. Like many other parts of Canada at that time, Chinese faced severe discrimination and violence. The third, the current Chinatown, was established in 1910 at the north end of the current Centre Street Bridge.

While today's Chinatown continues to serve its role as a social enclave, especially for newcomers and seniors, it is also a focal point for cultural experiences for Albertans of all backgrounds. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that both the city of Calgary and members of over 25 Chinese organizations are actively preparing a growing list of celebrations and festivities that is as diverse as the people who embrace Chinatown as part of their community. The city of Calgary will invest a total of half a million dollars to support Chinatown's beautification; exhibitions, including a digital commemorative project on the Chinese community; a youth engagement initiative; and an expanded Chinatown Street Festival. Other initiatives include the Chinatown historical buildings restoration project and a wide array of cultural programs and probably a banquet or two or three.

Mr. Speaker, I believe many hon. members in this House would agree that we are fortunate to witness this significant milestone for Chinatown, and I encourage all members to try to take in a few events in the months to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Accountability

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These are dark days for accountability and transparency in Alberta. It's incredibly sad that a Premier who once claimed to believe in those ideals has flip-flopped so completely, serving his own personal agenda at the expense of truth, clarity, openness, and fairness to the people of Alberta. The actions of this administration have served to draw a dark curtain over government, hiding the actions of an administration that has lost the trust of Albertans.

Yesterday the Auditor General delivered his latest report, a report that this administration tried to bury with a good-news story about distracted driving legislation. The Tories have been trying to silence

the Auditor General for months. They've ignored hundreds of recommendations; publicly chastised the Auditor General for speaking out; restricted the office's budget, causing the deferment or cancellation of a number of important audits, including occupational health and safety and water quality; and distributed in this House a paper by top Tory Ron Hicks that calls on the government to severely curb the powers of the Auditor General.

Yesterday the deputy chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the Tory Member for Calgary-Lougheed, was granted veto power over the chair's actions, neutering the entire purpose of that committee, whose mandate is to oversee government spending and ensure that public dollars are being used responsibly and in the public interest. Of course, the chair is an Alberta Liberal who tries to hold the government accountable. Yesterday in question period the Premier claimed not to know what went on in Public Accounts, a claim I frankly find unbelievable. I believe that Tory members of the Public Accounts Committee were directed by the Premier to give the deputy chair his new veto power in a deliberate attempt to silence a prominent source of aggravation to the ruling party. Predictably, our call for an emergency debate was dismissed.

Mr. Speaker, these Third World, banana republic tactics are a farce. They shame Alberta. Even former Tory MP John Williams called this administration's restrictions on Public Accounts, quote, shocking, and that was before this latest move.

I'd like to close by thanking the Alberta bloggers who are following the story. They are proving themselves to be a valuable addition to the fourth estate, showing as always . . . [Dr. Swann's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. In calling on the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, may I also wish him happy, happy birthday on his anniversary.

Lacombe Ford Atom A Rockets Lacombe Curb-Ease Pee Wee A Rockets

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hockey season in Lacombe concluded with outstanding results for two highly successful teams, the Lacombe Ford atom A Rockets and the Lacombe Curb-Ease pee wee A Rockets. Both won provincial titles and returned home with gold victory medals. After winning the zone 4 banner for the second year in a row, the Lacombe Ford atom A Rockets are the first Lacombe A atom team to win gold in provincials. They were undefeated in regular season and in playoffs and won provincials 5 to 1 in a hard-fought game against Taber.

The atom A team roster were players Justin Verveda, Dayton Playford, Chase Broderson, Elijah Funkhouser, Tyson Maris, Levi Glasman, Isaac Kingma, Tyler Masko, Matty Parton, Beaudon Rider, my next door neighbour Bradley Hellofs, Justin Paarup, Matthew Stegmaier, Jarrett Brandon, Eric Pecharsky, and Jordan Gill. Their coaches, and their parents, are Troy Rider, Darin Gill, Shawn Playford, Steve Parton, Kevin Broderson, and manager Greg Pecharsky.

The Lacombe Curb-Ease pee wee A Rockets also took home a provincial championship and unforgettable memories, winning the gold medal game 9 to 1 against Wainwright. Lacombe pee wee A Rockets team roster is Travis Verveda, Spencer Otto, Jesse Richardson, Kacey Straub, Zach Knight, Ty Wagar, Ty Glasman, David Luymes, Shae Reynolds, Colby Sissons, T.J. Brown, Cole Leggett Tyler Bell, and Tony Kozak. Their coaches are Allen Brown, Ralph Bell, Dean Otto, Shawn Wagar, and manager Mike Kozak.

Please join me in giving a great round of applause to these

dedicated and prepared athletes and their very supportive coaches and parents for their record-setting seasons.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, during one of the members' statements earlier this afternoon the hon. Government House Leader rose to advise that he wanted to raise a point of order. I'd just like to advise again that we've had this process for members' statements going back to the major reforms that were made in 1994, and we have always agreed in the past that there would not be points of order arising out of members' statements. So I just provide that as advice and see where we proceed.

Mr. Hancock: A point of clarification.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it at the conclusion of the Routine. Hon. Clerk, let's proceed.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the Premier and minister of health do not realize is that by failing to take action and put an end to the extravagant bonuses handed out to the Alberta Health Services executives, they agree with giving these people handfuls of taxpayers' dollars as a reward for bringing the health care system virtually to standstill. To the minister of health: will you or will you not put an end to the system that erodes public confidence?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I don't know if I've heard such a silly question in this Chamber in all the years I've been here. There are no policies in place to erode the system. What we have is an excellent system of health that we're still trying to improve. We've done that by providing additional dollars, by streamlining some of the processes, and by continuing to provide Albertans with the very best health care possible in these difficult circumstances.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that contracts don't guarantee bonuses, why are bonuses being given out to Alberta Health Services senior executives for poor performance? Why?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no poor performance associated with any of this. What there is are very specific, targeted performance measures, very specific benchmarks. Everybody is going to be very accountable. That's where we're at today. I'm not going to comment on stuff from the past, which is where the hon. leader appears to be living at the moment.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, why is it that this minister is going to wait for yet another review when he already knows what everybody in Alberta knows and wants him to do? Will he or will he not do the right thing? Put an immediate end to executive bonuses and guarantee that not a single bonus payment in '09-10 will be made in Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think I clarified quite clearly that what we're doing is honouring the commitments that were made, contractual commitments from a previous era. That is being done as we speak. I think it's important for people to know that there are a lot of streamlining costs that point to very outstanding performance.

For example, instead of 12 CEOs, now we have one. Instead of 66 senior vice-presidents, we have seven. That has saved millions of dollars, that are going back into providing outstanding care for Albertans across the province.

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

Health Services Executive Pensions

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the story goes on. The executives at Alberta Health Services not only have rich six-figure salaries; they also have two pensions. Count them: two, the local authorities pension plan and the supplemental executive retirement plan. The second, the supplemental executive retirement plan, does not require any employee contributions. To the minister: why are these executives so special that they are entitled to two pensions, one of which is totally paid for by taxpayers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated that all of this is under review, as are all the roles, responsibilities, and the very mandates of some of the positions he's talking about. What has to be kept in mind here is that while these individuals have been transferred from previous authorities into the new Alberta Health Services, they have inherited additional work. They are being compensated for that additional work because there's an increased workload, there are increased responsibilities that come with it, and we want the very best people occupying those positions.

Dr. Swann: Well, we know from documents that the Towers Perrin group has been working on this review for 10 months, Mr. Speaker. How many of the executives at Alberta Health Services are entitled to these gold-plated retirement plans paid for by taxpayers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the SERPs, as they're commonly referred to, are under review, and I'm not sure if they haven't even already been eliminated. But I will look into that.

Dr. Swann: Please do, Mr. Minister.

Given that the old executives who were simply transferred to Alberta Health Services are still entitled to these gold-plated retirement packages, what is the minister going to do to change the policy and this abuse of taxpayer funding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not my policy, but I am ultimately responsible, and I've said that I will look into it. These are policies that were brought into place by Alberta Health Services. It's the board that reports to me. It's the board that is responsible for overseeing the overall direction that it's going. But I have to account for it, and I will look into it.

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

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 28 marks the International Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured as a result of workplace accidents or diseases. Yesterday the Auditor General revealed that 110 orders for noncompliance with occupational health and safety legislation were suspended during a period when three Albertans a week were dying from workplace-related injuries or accidents. To the Minister of Employment and Immigra-

tion: why did the government suspend 110 occupational health and safety orders at a time when three Albertans a week were dying on the job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things I have done as a new minister is that I invited the Auditor General to meet with me some two months ago and give me an overview of what his perception of the department is and what issues he perceives there to be. He has given me an oral report, exactly identical to the one that we have here in writing, giving me a two months' head start on addressing some of these issues. As a matter of fact, I am proud to report to you that for the last two months I have been addressing any and all issues in this report, and I'm taking them very seriously.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. If you're going to address these issues, the first thing I would suggest you do is release the number and the list of all employers who have been allowed to cheat the occupational health and safety . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Well, I am glad that this member brought this question forward because one of the reviews that I'm doing right now is whether I am able to release not only the records of employers who are underperformers but all employers in Alberta so that Albertans can take a look and see how their place of employment is faring and whether they choose to work or not work for that particular employer. There are some complications relevant to getting accurate statistics, and there are some issues relevant to freedom of information legislation, but I am working through it right now. You will get an answer on it very shortly.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that, hon. minister. Again to the same minister: why did the government allow those 63 employers to cheat our occupational health and safety laws for so long, when the death rate in this province at that time was 166 workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I cannot give this member an accurate answer about what happened, but let me tell you about what will happen. As you may know, I spent a good part of my pre-elected life representing injured workers, so I take occupational health and safety very seriously. One thing that I will be doing is making sure that those who willingly choose to ignore the law will be dealt with appropriately.

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

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta waiting for cataract surgery as well as those who provide those surgeries have been blindsided by this government with less than four days' notice. Bill 11 required full and proper disclosure of all awarded health care contracts. Will the minister do the right thing and table all the RFPs in the House that were issued for cataract surgery facilities before the end of today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be having a meeting with the ophthalmological surgeons and the ophthalmological facility providers very, very soon, and I'm going to be looking into some of these issues surrounding that RFP. To the best of my

knowledge it was open, it was fair, it was transparent, and it yielded some excellent results that have resulted in lower cost prices for the provision of ophthalmological services in privately held facilities still paid for by the public purse. That means \$1.4 million of additional surgeries will be able to be done in addition to the 30,000-plus already in the system.

Mr. Hinman: Well, his knowledge is not complete, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Alberta Health Services has called an emergency meeting on the cataract foul-up, will the minister immediately issue a 60-day extension so those existing services can resume? Then we'll wait until we know what the right course of action actually is because the current one is wrong. We need a 60-day . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the current system is wrong at all. It provides outstanding services. What occurred here back in January, on January 15 to be exact, is an RFP closed. All service facilities doing ophthalmological surgeries were provided an opportunity to submit a bid. Bids came in from those who wished to participate, and those who didn't obviously didn't have a chance to win the bid. But the point here now is that I'll be meeting with those folks very soon, and I'll be listening to what some of those concerns are, and if there is something that can be done, we'll do it. For example, there is a second blitz coming up at the end of April, May, and June.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, this is a four-day foul-up that's going to impact forever. Given that the eye doctors are telling us that the government's latest health care foul-up has cut competition and choice for Albertans, will the minister do the right thing and let surgeons and staff decide where they best care for patients and those surgeries as they did in the past? The bid was put out, and then they chose whether or not they wanted to perform that surgery, not the minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, patients requiring eye surgery still have a choice of which physician they want to do it. As long as it's being done in the accredited facility, all of those facilities that are there, be they in Calgary or Edmonton – and let's be clear: we're only talking about Calgary and Edmonton – those facilities in those two locations will still take whichever accredited ophthalmologists can do the surgeries and the patients who choose them.

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

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Workers in Alberta know that this is a dangerous province to work in, with a workplace fatality rate that's 16 per cent higher than the national average. In 2008 166 workers died at their job. The Auditor General's report released yesterday shows that this government refuses to prosecute employers who chronically endanger workers, resulting in deaths and ruined lives. My question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What possible explanation can there be for this Tory government to refuse to prosecute rogue employers who systematically break the law, causing injuries and death to Alberta workers?

2:00

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are really two available approaches that the ministry has when dealing with employment,

one being education. Through education, actually, we have achieved very good statistics. Alberta has one of the lowest injury rates in Canada and the lowest workers' compensation premium rates. However, being a teacher I know that education sometimes falls on deaf ears, and there is room for enforcement. I will be very seriously considering right now enforcement on those who choose to ignore the rules.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Auditor General's report shows that the government actually manipulates information to hide the real story of reckless employers who endanger workers. We've had minister after minister who cries crocodile tears about worker deaths, but this department is participating in a deliberate support for continued dangerous workplaces. Why won't the minister stop his empty words about caring and instead take strong action to crack down on these dangerous employers who are instead currently getting refunds . . .

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, empty words. In the last two and a half months I have met with organized labour, with unions. I have met with groups of employers. I have met with my department staff, put in place a task force that will be looking at enforcement, that will be looking at releasing information. This is not an arena where you point fingers at each other. As a matter of fact, employers, employees, and government are in it together. We all have our skin in it, and it's our job to make sure that Alberta is the safest place to work in.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when people break the law, they are not protected by freedom of information laws, will this minister stop hiding behind FOIP and today release the list of all employers who chronically break the law and endanger their workers? Do it today, Mr. Minister. Stop hiding.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this member is actually asking me in the Legislature right now to break a law in pursuit of those who are breaking the law. I cannot do that. But what I can undertake to the House is that the moment – and it won't be long from now – I know that I can legally release the list, I will definitely release the list.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year the office of the Auditor General deferred an audit on workplace health and safety because this government limited the resources of the office. That happened during a year when 166 Albertans lost their lives as a result of injuries or disease. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How many lives would have been saved or how many injuries would have been prevented if the Auditor was allowed to do his real work last year instead of having to defer it for a year?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, again I have to thank this member for this question. Read the newspapers for the next few days, and you will be seeing that this department will be releasing ads advertising positions, hiring front-line workers to inspect places of employment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That should have been done two years ago.

Again to the same minister. Of the 166 . . .

An Hon. Member: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you say. These are lives at stake here, hon. minister, and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Of the 166 workplace fatalities recorded in 2008, how many were the responsibility of the 63 employers noted in the Auditor General's report and allowed to cheat occupational health and safety laws?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, nobody is allowed to cheat. Let's make that apparent. Those who are cheating or are perceived to be cheating will be dealt with accordingly.

I cannot release the number of casualties in those particular places of employment because, like I indicated earlier, at this point in time I cannot legally release the list, but I will be releasing the list the moment I find out that it is appropriate for me to do so. When I release it, I will make sure that it is an accurate list, so you will know, hon. member, who are the employers who follow the rules and who don't follow the rules and why.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of following the rules, again to the same minister. Will the minister demand that the employers, the 63 employers who cheated on occupational health and safety laws and received grants, incredibly, from this government for their actions will have to repay the rebates that they were given from their WCB premiums? How is that fair?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, another thank you to the member. Thank you for bringing up the premiums. What the member is I imagine referring to is the COR program. One of the things I have done, having met with the Auditor General two months ago, is that I'm having a thorough review of the COR program because the purpose of this program is to reward good performers and make them more competitive and punish poor performers to make sure that they are not competitive in the market, bidding for contracts against employers who actually follow the rules.

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

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have long been advocating for my constituents in Chateau Estates, and through that work the Ministry of Transportation has promised to connect a road between 84th Street and 100th Street N.E. The land has been bought and a promise made. Can the minister tell my constituents when the road will be built?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this member that I'm very aware of his concerns and intend to fulfill the promise I made to him and his constituents. This member is very much aware that there are issues with gas pipelines that cross the road alignment, and my officials are working with the pipeline companies to modify the pipeline crossing so that we can get going on this road. I assure this member that the road will be built.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell me why these issues have not been resolved after so many months given the fact that I was given the same responses a few months ago from the minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I share this member's frustration, and I had hoped that this would be resolved by now. However, it's a very complex legal agreement that we're working on with the pipeline companies, and it's taking longer than we had anticipated. Perhaps this member can talk to some of his friends in the legal profession and try to get them to speed up a bit. However, I want to emphasize to the member that this road will be built as soon as we can, and that's my guarantee.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take that guarantee to the bank, Minister. Do you have any idea on a completion date?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member and his constituents that this government is addressing their access concerns. The new road will provide reasonable access for the area for local traffic while maintaining all the safety and design standards for the nearby Stoney Trail ring road. I know that this particular member works very, very hard for his constituents, but how many times do I have to keep telling him that we're going to build the road?

Income Support for Emergency Housing

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from a number of constituents that their rent support has run out and that the income support has turned them away, telling them to move to cheaper accommodations, but affordable housing is all too rare, and rents have not come down. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: Albertans are not receiving the housing support they need from this government, so how much of the income support budget is going towards emergency housing?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I cannot give the member the actual percentage, and that's something that I would gladly get back to her on if she is looking at percentages from the budget. I can tell you one thing. We do provide assistance for individuals who find themselves in a difficult position, and part of the assistance is a housing allowance that provides for rent. What percentage of the overall budget is the housing allowance? That's a very technical question, and I'll be glad to come back with the actual numbers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I look forward to that answer.

Given that since this minister has taken over control of the homelessness and eviction prevention fund, no one has any idea of how big the cuts have been to the program, will the minister make this information public?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, how much more public can my budget be? I was in estimates. I'm not sure if that member attended estimates or read the *Hansard*, but I have gone through estimates line by line, and members of the opposition could have asked me any questions that they want. I can table a copy of this ministry's budget in the Legislature at the next opportunity, and she can look through it. All the numbers are for public consumption.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Same minister. Given that other provinces like Ontario and B.C. make this information and much more information about income support public, why is this government keeping Albertans in the dark? It isn't always clear in the budget. It comes across just as lines.

2:10

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member comes from Lethbridge, and I understand they had some electricity problems in southern Alberta, hence the darkness. We have a budget that we have tabled in the House. I have gone through this ministry's estimates line by line, open to anybody's questions. I can table the budget of this ministry that itemizes every single expenditure. We also have the blue book that shows every contract expense the ministry has. I'm not sure how much more transparent I can be other than asking the member to come to my office, sit down with me, and I'll discuss it with her.

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

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has reviewed government's health and safety program and flagged a number of concerns, as has been brought up many times in this House. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In particular, the Auditor General recommends that government take action against employers who repeatedly fail to comply with occupational health and safety laws. Will the minister act on this recommendation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, not only will I act, but I already have acted, and I'm determined to continue to do so. One of this government's priorities is to make sure that Alberta is competitive. Being a safe place of employment makes you very competitive. You attract workers, you retain workers, and your WCB premiums are low. They are already the lowest in Canada, but I know that we can do even better than that, so that's something that I'm committed to and will continue working on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister. The Auditor General talked about suspending compliance orders at the end of the fiscal year. Why would officers be allowed to try again next year as a way of enforcing safety?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I said earlier, my energy as a minister is limited, so I will apportion now and into the future what I am doing and what I will be doing. I know for a fact that education was one of the priorities of this ministry, and I will carry on with the educational component because it has been serving us exceptionally well. There is room for improvement. I accept that. I will never argue with any statements that the Auditor General has made. I take them under advisement, and I will continue acting on them.

Mr. Bhardwaj: No other questions.

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

Cataract Surgery (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The uncertainty continues to swirl around Alberta Health Services' decision to consolidate cataract surgeries in fewer clinics. There are serious concerns that the emphasis was more on cutting costs than on protecting public safety. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: is it true that the clinics that won the cataract bids are reusing the equipment they use in cataract surgeries, or are they meeting the same standards as cataract surgery in public hospitals, which is to use disposable equipment?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are very specific standards regarding that particular question, and I discussed it with some ophthalmologists, in fact, on the weekend. In some cases they use stainless steel, and those particular blades are chucked out at the end of the operation. In other cases they might be using diamond blades, and in those cases they can be sterilized and reused. That's my understanding from the ophthalmologists. They are very closely scrutinized in that regard by the college.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Well, when the minister is looking into it, he should ask about the use of cannulas and other equipment in addition to the blades.

What does the minister say in response to reports that Alberta Health Services is planning to close the cataract surgery program in Wetaskiwin? Is this true?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I haven't heard any such news whatsoever. In fact, I'm surprised to have it raised, but I can assure him that it'll be looked into immediately.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister. Given that there are growing reports that Alberta Health Services is planning to save money by charging patients for the lenses that are implanted during cataract surgery, will the minister reassure Albertans that he will put a stop to any such plan?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again, speaking with ophthalmologists over the last couple of weeks, I've asked some of these same questions. There is a standard lens that is provided and covered, paid for by the public payer. That's us, essentially. If, however, the patient wants or requires an upgraded lens, then they simply are asked to pay the difference, but that is a patient's choice. Otherwise, they have a standardized lens that works perfectly well in most cases. But, again, some of it is patient choice.

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

Employment Supports for PDD Clients

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have been asking me about employment supports for people with developmental disabilities. Employment can give us a sense of pride and purpose and connects us with others and to our communities, so it's very important that all people get to experience this, but it's often very difficult for people with disabilities. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What are we doing to help employers and engage more employers to connect with

people with developmental disabilities who are actually interested in working?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that employment gives us more than just a paycheque, as the hon. member has stated. Our persons with developmental disabilities program through the six PDD regions provides funding to a number of employment agencies and employment initiatives across the province. This supports about 3,000 individuals with developmental disabilities to access PDD employment supports programming. One such initiative is the Rotary employment partnership, which helps to connect employers and potential employees. There are approximately 80 PDD-funded agencies in Alberta, 15 of which are in Calgary, that provide similar employment supports.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is to the same minister. How can we tell if our existing employment programs for these people are actually doing what they are supposed to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to persons with disabilities. This commitment includes helping Albertans with developmental disabilities if they wish to find work. Province-wide about 65 per cent of PDD-funded individuals who want employment have found jobs. I believe the number is even higher in the Calgary region at 70 per cent.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At last count more than 1,700 seniors were on a wait-list for long-term care. In the last election government promised 600 new long-term care spaces. Instead, two days ago the chair of Alberta Health Services wrote that as of September 2009 there has actually been a net decline of 70 beds since the last election. To the minister of health: why is the government investing public funds in for-profit private facilities that won't offer the care that is desperately needed by at least 1,700 Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is providing thousands of more spaces. In fact, I think it was just yesterday that the Minister of Infrastructure released a headline that said that seniors will benefit from more than 1,000 continuing care spaces. The fact is that there are new technologies. There are new changes that are coming forward, and they're helping seniors find appropriate accommodation in a community care setting.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that at least 1,700 Albertans have been medically assessed as requiring long-term care, not some form of lesser care but long-term care, and given that every extra day or week they wait causes more suffering for them and their families, why won't the minister tell us today exactly how many, if any, of the spaces announced yesterday are going toward the 1,700-bed needs deficit or, at the very least, toward the 680-bed deficit . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has yet to understand is that yesterday's announcement dealt specifically with the capital bonds and, I think, some ASLI, the affordable supportive living initiative, dollars as well, which is in a different ministry. However, there will be other announcements coming out very soon addressing long-term care spaces. If they'll just be patient for that, it will come, and Albertans, I'm sure, will be very pleased with the news that accompanies it.

Ms Notley: Well, given that more than 1,700 Albertans are still waiting for long-term care at last count and given that their needs simply can't be met within a level 1 or 2 or 3 supportive living environment, why is this government investing up to \$50 million of Alberta citizens' money in for-profit companies, who charge up to \$3,500 per month for rooms that simply don't meet the needs of Alberta's most vulnerable seniors?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I assume that's to me. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for the \$50 million that exists in this year's ASLI budget, the minister of seniors would tell you that parlays into about a hundred million dollars of investment. Other people in the community, the builders, are bringing in their own money to help make those projects a reality, and additional stuff paid for by the health budget will be forthcoming very soon.

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

Child Intervention Services

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A month has passed since I asked a series of budgetary debate questions, including concerns over the cut of \$27 million from child intervention services. In 2008-2009 less than 260 families of the approximately 13,000 Alberta children in custody received family enhancement services. Last year over 90 per cent of children taken into custody were not reunited with their birth families. To the minister: when will I receive written answers to the budget debate questions?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have addressed that question in the Assembly, and I can tell you that I have not changed my approach with that. I will not be providing any further answers to Committee of Supply. I consider those answers to have been complete at the time, and that's just the way it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the minister admitted on the record that she will not fulfill her ministerial duties to provide answers to budgetary questions.

Why is so little focus and funding support committed to birth families compared to the financial costs and emotional trauma associated with custody? It's grab first, support second.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's absolutely incorrect. This member knows that. I've addressed that in the

Assembly as well. We had a Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act come into place in 2004, and this member knows that as well. That act is where the caseworker goes to a home along with the support worker, and those workers assess the home with the family. Many children that previously may have been taken into care immediately stay with the family while they provide support to the family. It's a complete new way and approach of handling the child and family and youth care, and it's a good way.

Mr. Chase: That gives very little comfort to the 13,000 children in custody and their families.

How can the minister justify cutting \$27 million from child intervention services when there is \$15 billion remaining in the sustainability fund? How is this cruelly unnecessary cut either in the best interests of Alberta's children or their broken families?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, honestly, the way that you dismiss the good work that's being done out in the field is amazing. The child, family, and youth enhancement workers are working very hard along with the lead agencies. They have a lead agency model where they go together and where they assess families, they provide the services as they're needed, and they assist children. Immediately they protect children and they care for children, and they're very thoughtful in how they do this. I was on Friday at two case reviews with both the lead agency and the caseworkers, and there were approximately 20 people involved. You know, hon. member, that this is working.

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

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Public-private partnerships, P3s, have repeatedly, both in Alberta and around the world, shown to provide value for money, yet the Auditor General released his report yesterday, noting that the province did not demonstrate to Albertans that the ASAP P3 provided value for money. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the province doing about this?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that the Auditor General very much concluded in his report that, in fact, it did provide value for the money and also that it was the lowest bid and the risk allocated was appropriate. In fact, there were \$97 million of savings in ASAP 1. What was recommended was that a better job needed to be done in demonstrating that value to the public of Alberta. Now, we accept this, and we're going to do a better job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister: speaking of posting a value-for-money report for ASAP 2, are you saying that the second-phase project is providing value for taxpayers?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the value is going to be provided in ASAP 2. The final details from the signing will take place very shortly, and we will announce the cost of the project and the final savings. As I was going to mention before, we are following up with a value-for-money report, and it will be on our website very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: was it presumptuous of government to move forward with a second-phase project even before we actually had the analysis of the first phase?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, not at all. In fact, we did save approximately \$100 million. We were on track. We delivered the project, in fact, 18 months ahead of schedule, schools to be opened up for next fall. The process has been recognized nationally and provincially and also with the Conference Board of Canada. Why would we not do it again? It is a good process, and it does provide value, as the Auditor General has stated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Arts and Culture Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our arts organizations were told last summer that cuts might be 10 to 15 per cent, but they should hold on as things might change. Yet here we are in the new fiscal year. The budget cuts were 19 per cent, but groups are still holding on and haven't been told and are trying to budget for their 2010-11 seasons without knowing their final numbers. Contrary to the minister's written response, there is a fair notice policy for grant suspension; it's just not being used. So my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. When will arts organizations be given the final grant numbers reflecting the 19 per cent cut?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had stated in estimates that we would be working through those through our arts department, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The organizations will be notified of the amount that they will be receiving in short order.

Ms Blakeman: Well, he's the minister of culture. Does he not understand the timelines that most of these organizations are working upon? They have to release their seasons, do all of the media, print brochures, hire people, even choose which shows. How long is he going to make them wait?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, our staff in our department has been in contact with many of these organizations on an ongoing basis. We have said that most of the money that will be found will be realized through savings or efficiencies. It will not go to grant reductions to those organizations. We're trying to work through that to make sure that is the case. Right now my department is giving me no indication that any one of these organizations will not be funded to the extent that they were last year.

Ms Blakeman: I'll be interested in how 20 per cent can be found out of administrative.

Given that the AFA has an actual fair notice policy to inform and work with struggling groups that may see their funding cut, why is the minister not following a similar policy to work with organizations that lose funding because of these government cutbacks? You're not going to find it in administration.

Mr. Blackett: Well, to answer the question, the comment that the hon. member made, last year we had a reduction of \$8.9 million. We were able through efficiencies to realize the savings, and we

were able to fund every one of those not-for-profits to the level that they received a year before, as promised in the budget last year. I see no reason that we won't be able make that commitment to them this year. We'll see in due course if my words speak for themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance (continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent Nisku, which is the home of a very large manufacturing workforce. As such, I was very interested in the Auditor General's review of this government's health and safety program. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In particular the Auditor General notes that half of the employers who fail to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act also continue to hold a certificate of recognition, or COR, indicating that they meet established standards. Will the minister tell us how such bad performers can obtain and, in fact, keep CORs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main prerogative of the COR program is to enhance and promote safety at a job site. Many employers who are in high-risk categories that naturally had higher rates of incidents would sign up for the COR program. However, then there was an expectation that they would improve their rate of injuries. As long as they were improving their rates of injuries and working with the educational programs, they could maintain that COR status. However, if there is no improvement and if they are not working within the parameters of the COR expectations, indeed they should not be permitted to have the COR status.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: even if the COR holders improve, why would they be given rebates on their WCB premiums for good health and safety performance when they refuse to comply with Alberta's health and safety requirements?

2:30

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Compensation Board rewards participants of COR because what it really says is that they are willing to change their practices, that they are willing to adapt their practices and become safe performers. There is some initial incentive for those employers. But as time goes on, the Workers' Compensation Board only rebates the premiums based on performance. So if there is no improvement in performance, there should not be any additional rebates, nor should they hold the status. That is part of the review that I'm doing right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: maybe your review will answer this, but if an employer does not comply, why can't you simply revoke their COR?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I most definitely can. That's something that I am looking into right now. Let's be frank here. Injuries are simply unacceptable. I don't even buy into the term "accidents."

They're not accidents; they're incidents. If you were to turn time back one minute on every incident, it wouldn't occur because they're preventable. Now, my job is to make sure that we reward good performers and definitely not reward those who choose not to comply. That is as simple as it gets. That's something that I'm very committed to, and that's something that I will be working on as time goes on.

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

Royal Alberta Museum

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Getting clarity out of this government can be elusive. We have a federal MP announcing in a mailing an \$85 million contribution to the Royal Alberta Museum, and then we have the Minister of Infrastructure saying that the capital plan does include the Royal Alberta Museum and the minister of culture saying that \$83 million over three years will pay for a building design and maybe collection purchases. Yikes. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: how do Albertans figure out where our museum is, how many will be built, who's paying, and when it will be built? How are we supposed to know?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before in this House, I believe that the government of Alberta committed to the Museum of Nature on the Glenora site in the neighbourhood of \$240 million. We are in principle looking at a two-museum site. The first, the Museum of Nature, is on the capital plan; it has been deferred out a number of years. The federal government has not made an announcement. They have not contacted our office and indicated that they're making any announcement, so I'm not sure what the question is.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, how much of the \$83 million in funding for the Royal Alberta Museum is from the federal government? You have it in print here. Is the province's entire budget really federal money?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reference "you have it in print" is a reference to a publication that is not something produced by the government of Alberta. If it's something that the federal government has produced, ask them the question since they are the ones who produced it.

Ms Blakeman: Is the minister saying that the \$83 million that appears in his budget is 100 per cent money from Alberta taxpayers through provincial government coffers?

Mr. Blackett: As we said in estimates, I believe that \$30 million was promised by the federal government in 2005, and the \$50 million remaining, if I remember correctly, was going to come out of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit of the government of Alberta.

Health Professions Scope of Practice

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Health Professions Act and the Pharmacy and Drug Act amendments came into force last year, giving qualified pharmacists the right to prescribe certain drugs. Nova Scotia has also showed some initiative in this area by allowing nurse practitioners to do some prescribing of drugs. There have been suggestions that Alberta's health care system could be made more efficient if we broadened the scope of practice of some of our health

care professionals. All of my questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister advise the House whether his department or Health Services has any plans for initiatives to expand the scope of practice of our health care professionals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we in fact addressed some of this through the Vision 2020 document, that was provided to all members and to the public a year or two ago. Nurse practitioners have in fact been able to prescribe medications since the 1990s. Now, in addition to that, we're also doing a review, a pilot, right now with pharmacies and pharmacists across the province to see what sort of expanded scope of services they can have and where we can compensate them for doing that. They already, for example, are able to prescribe some drug treatments, and they're also allowed to extend or continue prescriptions made by other health practitioners. This is very much a timely subject, and I'm grateful to the hon. member for raising it.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister assure Alberta's health care professionals that all of their professional governing bodies would be consulted before he makes any changes in the scope of practice of any of the health care professions?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that's done as a regular feature of the work that we do. In fact, whenever any legislative amendments are contemplated by this minister, we will ensure that people such as those suggested will be contacted. For example, any changes that may come forward are also brought to the Health Professions Advisory Board for their input. They receive submissions, and so do we.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Rural Physician Recruitment

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently learned that my local medical centre in Cold Lake will be losing three of its physicians. Losing three doctors in a city the size of Cold Lake is a serious concern for my constituents as it will affect timely access to quality medical services and procedures. Specifically speaking, the loss will mean that the emergency and operating room of our health centre will be short-staffed. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is your ministry doing to ensure that these positions are filled as quickly as possible so that delays in accessing medical procedures can be avoided?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have a very active program, RPAP, which is the rural physician action plan, and through that Alberta Health Services very aggressively does whatever it can to recruit doctors both from local or national sources or from other locations. They offer an extremely competitive compensation package along with other incentives for people to relocate. My understanding is that at least two physicians are currently on the bubble for Cold Lake, and we're working on the third one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. As rural, remote communities have a harder time attracting doctors than metropolitan centres like Edmonton and Calgary, what incentives does this government currently provide to attract and retain doctors to rural communities, and do you think these incentives require improvements?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, having grown up in rural Alberta, I know how important this issue is there, and it's important throughout the province. That's why we provide specific funding, for example, to third-year medical students in order to help them complete their third year of clinical rotations in rural areas. We also fund a dedicated family medicine residency program to train physicians in rural communities. We offer other incentives like that as well.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the same minister. Given that we have a number of medical graduates from Alberta seeking employment within our province, what is your ministry doing in order to retain and provide employment opportunities specifically to Alberta-born medical personnel wishing to practise here?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we provide additional incentives such as the business benefit program, which sees us covering some of the office overhead for medical grads to situate themselves in rural Alberta. We offer assessment honoraria. We also pay relocation expenses of up to \$10,000. So there's a lot going on. Just recently I also spoke with some folks about a possible bursary program and what could be done to augment that because we understand how important it is for rural Alberta to have the best people possible.

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

Access to Laws and Regulations

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having access to the laws of the land is one of the hallmarks of democracy, yet Alberta's Queen's Printer charges copyright fees to organizations that want to reproduce Alberta's laws and regulations. These fees range from \$250 to as much as \$3,000 per year. My constituents and the Canadian Publishers' Council have contacted Service Alberta expressing opposition on behalf of many organizations to these fees. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why are these copyright fees in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct: access to Alberta's laws and regulations is very important. That's why I've decided to cancel these copyright fees. The copyright will still continue to be owned by the Queen's Printer, but organizations will be allowed to reproduce Alberta's laws and regulations without paying a fee, and the Canadian Publishers' Council is being made aware of this. One thing I want to stress is that despite these copyright fees Albertans have had and continue to have free access to all laws and regulations on the Queen's Printer's website.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will the new policy be in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This takes place immediately. No further copyright fees will be charged. Existing copyright agreements with specific organizations will continue to be in place until they expire, but there will be no new agreements on fees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will changing this policy have any impact on government revenues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The revenues from copyright agreements averaged about \$20,000 per year. This is not a lot compared to some of the other revenue that we get from the Queen's Printer. Regardless of the revenue loss, the most important thing is that this is the right thing to do. Citizens of Alberta deserve to have access to the laws of our province, and this decision helps ensure this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude the question period for today. Today 20 hon. members were recognized for 114 questions and answers: nine members from the Official Opposition, three from the independents, and eight from the government caucus.

In 15 seconds from now we'll proceed with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Kevin Koe Rink World Curling Champions

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to rise today to recognize the tremendous accomplishments of Alberta's Kevin Koe rink at the 2010 World Men's Curling Championship. On Sunday, April 11, Kevin Koe's rink dominated the Norway team at the world championship final in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from the very first end, finishing with a 9-3 victory.

This world championship win caps off a dream season for the local rink, who curls out of the Saville Sports Centre right here in Edmonton. Over the past year they claimed their first Alberta provincial championship, their first Brier, and now the world championship. The Brier and the world championship wins are even more impressive as Koe, a Grande Prairie resident, is the first skip in 38 years to win both the Brier and the world championship on the first try. They now join an illustrious group of Alberta Brier and world champion curlers, including Kevin Martin, Randy Ferbey, and Pat Ryan.

The achievements of the Koe rink and their amazing run to win a provincial, national, and world championship will be remembered for years to come. They are not just champions here in Alberta but, to quote our good friends in Italy, *campioni del mondo*, which means champions of the world.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating skip Kevin Koe, third Blake MacDonald, second Carter Rycroft, and lead Nolan Thiessen on their world championship. Albertans are incredibly proud of your efforts.

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

Katharine Hay

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to pay tribute to a young Albertan who passed away too soon but in her short time with us made a real impact on me and on the province. Katharine Hay passed away last month in Edmonton from complications of kidney disease at the age of 24. Katharine served as a chair of the

New Democratic Youth of Alberta, was the NDP candidate in Sherwood Park in the last election, and was an excellent event organizer and fundraiser. She travelled to British Columbia during their last provincial election, working to re-elect Cariboo North MLA Bob Simpson.

In addition, Katharine was a talented biathlete, excellent cross-country skier, and participated in cutting-horse shows as a turnback rider. During the past year Katharine was enrolled in NAIT's radio and television arts program, pursuing a career in radio news. Katharine did all this and more in spite of having to battle kidney disease her entire life. She showed how courage and determination can change lives and, hopefully, can contribute to changing a province.

At a time when young people are often discouraged from getting involved in public affairs and frustrated by a political system that does not speak to their concerns, Katharine showed that politically engaged youth could make a difference. I know her example inspired others to become involved as well.

Before her passing Katharine was preparing to run in the Kidney Foundation of Alberta's annual give the gift of life fun run and walk. Many of her friends will now be running and walking in her memory at Rundle park on April 25. Donations for Team Kat now exceed \$3,700 and can be made online at www.kidney.ca.

Katharine has left an indelible mark on me, on our party, and on our province. I am very proud to have had her on my team.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Parkinson's Awareness Month

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, April 12, each member in this Assembly was presented with a tulip from the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta. As Parkinson's official flower, the tulip reminds us of the importance of research. Much has been accomplished in this field, but a cure has yet to be found.

Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, and I urge all Albertans to do what they can to help raise awareness about this disease and to make much-needed donations. Parkinson's is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease. While Parkinson's has significant effects on the body, it leaves the mind untouched. Approximately a hundred thousand Canadians live with this debilitating disease and are affected by tremors, slowness, balance issues, and muscle rigidity. The average age of diagnosis with Parkinson's is 60, but it can affect people as young as 30 or 40.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Parkinson's societies of southern and northern Alberta and what they do for individuals and families who live with Parkinson's. Supported by volunteers, donations, and dedicated staff, they provide counselling, support groups for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers, learning resources, referrals, peer programs, in-service community awareness programs, and speech therapy. Parkinson's is not easy to live with, but nonprofit organizations make a world of difference for many Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Health Day

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to speak about World Health Day, which was celebrated last week on April 7. Alberta's theme for the celebrations was Healthier Communities for a Healthier Alberta.

World Health Day is an opportunity to encourage all Albertans to take an active role in improving their health and making their communities healthier places to live, work, and play. Creating safe environments, taking personal responsibility, and investing in our health and wellness is a core foundation of building strong communities and a vigorous province. Albertans participating in their wellness reduce the rates of preventable injuries and chronic diseases, which lessens the need for future and further treatment and expenditures.

Current statistics tell us why improving wellness is such an urgent issue. Fifty per cent of Albertans are at a higher risk for chronic disease due to being overweight, obese, and physically inactive. More than 20 per cent of Canadian children and youth aged two to 17 are either overweight or obese, and the number of people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a preventable illness, has more than doubled in the past 20 years.

Last spring I had the pleasure of participating in the Communities ChooseWell awards ceremony recognizing a record 162 Albertan communities that challenged their residents to eat healthy, be active, and have fun exercising. I know these community challenges inspired and motivated residents, Mr. Speaker. In fact, many of these programs and activities still continue.

World Health Day reminds us that we need to have the power to make healthy choices that dramatically impact our lives. I encourage all Albertans to make healthier food choices, incorporate at least 30 minutes of physical activity into every day, and join with family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers to make our communities safer and healthier.

In short, let's get Albertans eating right, moving more, getting enough sleep, having a little bit of fun in a balanced life, and being kind to one another.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30, less an hour, I'd like to give oral notice . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, unfortunately, I cannot permit you to proceed as your application would violate one of the fundamental rules of our Assembly, and that is Standing Order 30(1). The hon. member chooses to submit a proposal for a notice under Standing Order 30. Standing Order 30(1) clearly states:

After the daily routine and before the Orders of the Day, any Member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance when written notice has been given to the Speaker at least 2 hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.

The sitting of the Assembly commences at 1:30 p.m., so the Speaker would have needed to receive in his office by 11:30 such a request. I received the notice from you at 1:10 p.m., and by that time the member had already been notified by at least one table officer that it would have been inappropriate to proceed, so on that basis we are not proceeding with this application.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a report from my constituency office regarding correspondence we've received in regard to Fort Chipewyan. This is essentially a

form letter. I've repeated the central part of the note, and it was sent to me on behalf of the following people: Janelle Morin, Ali Grotowski, Jennifer Taylor, Alicia Hibbert, Shaun Mott, Jason Youngren, Eddie Biggley, Melissa Horner, Ann Hazlett, Jolanda Thomas, and Jade Zalaskyh.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling is the requisite number of copies of correspondence from postsecondary students Nikita Ora Tetarenko, Alastair MacKinnon, Stephanie Maddison, and Julia Rees, all expressing their concerns about the increasing costs to students and their ability to complete their educational plans.

My second set of tablings is from concerned Albertans Irene MacDonald, James and Jamie Hogg, and Erin Stolte, all expressing the same concerns specifically related to medical schools and the reduction in medical school seats.

My next set of tablings is from Albertans Brenda Herring, Khrysty Greif, Alicia Motuz, Lindsay Verrier, and Darlene Abbott, all supporting the proper funding of high-quality education, with Mrs. Abbott particularly upset about public education funding going to private schools.

I'm tabling a letter from Erika Thompson expressing serious concerns about the draft K to 12 arts education curriculum framework and which details a number of those concerns.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an e-mail from my constituent Janet Castonguay, a dental hygienist who loves her job but who has suffered a work injury only to find that her employer is not required to protect her through either WCB or private insurance. Employment insurance, unfortunately, only covers 40 per cent of her wages for a maximum of six weeks, and Janet doesn't understand why high-earning professional businesses are not required to provide protection for employees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table approximately 2,300 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and are in addition to the 570 postcards tabled by the Alberta NDP caucus in the past few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your accommodation in us not having to photocopy five copies of all of those.

The Speaker: The chair will make a comment with respect to that last comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has tabled 2,300 documents. Having been advised of this, it seemed prudent on the basis of the protection of the trees of the province of Alberta and the environment of the province of Alberta and the greening initiatives of this Assembly that it would probably be appropriate on this occasion to permit a single tabling of each document, 2,300 as opposed to the 16,500 that would have been required. This is not precedent setting.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it at all. I also have two other tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Alberta Health

Services which includes a breakdown of the province's continuing care beds into auxiliary hospital, nursing home, designated assisted living, and other categories. The document relates to the questions asked by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona earlier today.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an online petition started by Veronica Mundell calling on the government to "keep the Liquid Cytology Cervical Cancer screening labs in Lethbridge, Red Deer, and the [University of Alberta] Hospital." The petition has 1,317 names. These are in addition to the 1,432 names tabled previously. Many of these have included comments such as: I have been personally affected by cervical cancer in my life and was so thankful that I did not need to wait for weeks or months to get my test results back because Lethbridge has its own site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair cannot let the hon. member go further without further comment with respect to his comment about: perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned this. The chair would like to advise the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that transparency is always more appropriate than surreptitious action and undercover activity, and it's the philosophy of the chair that transparency will be the mode of the day.

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. Mr. Oberle, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo; Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; Mr. Boutilier, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo; Mr. Kang, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall; and Dr. Brown, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, on March 17, 2010, in the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security main estimates debate.

Projected Government Business

Ms Blakeman: Under Standing Order 7(6) I would request that the Government House Leader please share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week commencing Monday the 19th, government business commencing on the 20th.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, April 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate being in a position to discuss Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, in Committee of the Whole. We anticipate that, following today's progress, the remaining bills 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 will be in third reading. We'll proceed in third reading on those bills or as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, the 21st, we would anticipate that bills 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 would be in third reading. We would proceed in that order on those bills in third reading and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 22, we would proceed with those same bills as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: During the Routine today the hon. Government House Leader advised that he would want to rise on a point of order. The chair did intercept that and did indicate that the chair had not really been very enthusiastic about receiving points of order with respect

to members' statements. The Government House Leader indicated he would rise on a point of clarification.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 13(2) "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." In order to ask for that clarification, under 13(1) "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and decide questions of order." In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it refers to members' statements.

In presiding over the conduct of this daily activity, Speakers have been guided by a number of well-defined prohibitions . . .

- all questions raised must be on matters of concern but do not necessarily have to be on matters of urgent necessity;
- personal attacks are not permitted.

On page 422 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* there's another provision which indicates, of course, as is standard in the rest of our standing orders, that one should not refer to a person who is not a member of the House and therefore not able to defend themselves.

Now, I understand that our order of precedents and practice over a number of years has been that points of order are not raised during members' statements. In fact, we pride ourselves on having an opportunity for members' statements to allow any private member of this Assembly to have two minutes' opportunity to discuss a matter that's of importance to them or their constituents. Actually, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* indicates some statements. For example,

- congratulatory messages, recitations of poetry and frivolous matters are out of order.

That has not actually been followed in recent practice, and we've certainly seen that in this House, but the others have been.

Mr. Speaker, if your ruling is that points of order can never be raised with respect to a member's statement, then I would ask you to clarify how proper decorum in the House is to be maintained when, as the Leader of the Opposition did today, a personal attack on the Premier's integrity and honesty is raised. As the Leader of the Official Opposition did today raise the question – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues. I asked to see if I could get some transcription, but I couldn't. But he did refer to "top Tory Ron Hicks." Well, Ron Hicks has been a chief deputy minister of the government and a stellar civil servant for a number of years. I don't think the Leader of the Opposition would have any information to ever suggest that he was a member of the Conservative Party or was partisan in any way.

So it was entirely – I could go on. There are other things, but I know that this is not exactly a point of order. It is a point of clarification. There have to be some limits. Mr. Speaker, if you're not going to intercede during members' statements to call people to order when they breach the rules, how, then, are we going to make sure that people cannot do during members' statements what is clearly inappropriate?

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Also on 13(2), asking for the Speaker to explain, I've been reviewing some of the Speaker's previous comments, and I'm very much in mind of the consistent set of comments that he gives us at the beginning of every session in which he makes note on a point of order that a member should refrain from making editorial comments on the matter under consideration. We've had a great deal of editorializing

thus far considering that it's not a point of order. So that door being opened, I'm going through it.

I have a copy of the Leader of the Official Opposition's statement, and I cannot find in his statement where anything was directly attributed to the Premier. We've talked about the actions of his administration. Certainly, the Premier is the head of the government who administers, so I don't see that that is a false statement to make. As I went further through this, it talks about that the leader believes and finds something not believable and, you know, talks about his belief that there may have been instructions from the Premier's office given to the deputy chair around that veto power. Just looking at these remarks, it's not saying that the Premier said anything, frankly. It's talking about his administration. It's talking about his political agenda, which he certainly has and publishes on a regular basis through the Public Affairs Bureau and through press releases and through banners that are put up when he speaks.

Regarding the third party that was mentioned, frankly, I'm a little surprised to hear the Government House Leader saying that he sees it as a bad thing that someone would be named as a Tory. My understanding is that all of the members of government are a member of that party, and I thought he would have been proud of that. I don't know that calling someone a Tory in this province is a bad thing, and I don't think it was delivered by the Leader of the Official Opposition with any malice. It was stated more or less as an observation.

There are so few opportunities for members who are not in the government to have control of the floor for a few short minutes to make statements. I think it's been one of the hallmarks of this particular Speaker's influence on this Assembly that the two minutes granted to private members has been protected by the Speaker and continues to be protected by the Speaker. I'm aware that he has held to that ruling through a number of challenges. I hope he continues to do that. He's certainly taken the opportunity – and I'm mindful of a couple of specific instances – to ask members to be careful of that special privilege that is granted to them in that points of order have not been entertained. He's done that on more than one occasion that I can remember, and I think that's perfectly appropriate.

I would argue that there is no point of order, definitely, and I would not usually require any point of clarification. The Speaker has been pretty clear that he protects that time but it needs not to be abused, and I don't believe it was abused today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we could go on for quite a period of time. However, let me just give a little bit of background with respect to this and make some comments. This was raised as a point of clarification. I would draw members' attention to some statements made by this chair in days gone by with respect to this.

First of all, just a little historical perspective. The concept of members' statements was introduced in this House in 1993 as the result of discussions between the then Government House Leader, who happened to be me, and the House leader of the Official Opposition. The gentleman's name is Grant Mitchell. He became the Leader of the Official Opposition.

One of the agreed-upon principles that we had when this matter was introduced to the House, and these are words that I gave on May 18, 2005:

One of the agreed principles we had was that we would ask all members in the Assembly to deal with the highest degree of civility with respect to these statements, to not bring into question any other member, and to deal essentially with thoughts that they had. [And] in replacement or evenness for that, no member would rise on a point of order or on a point of privilege.

This matter was revisited on April 5, 2006, and then on May 3, 2006.

As I recall, going back to 1993, there have been three interventions with respect to members' statements, today being the fourth.

So if you take a look at all of the members' statements that were uttered in the House and given in the House, in essence, for the most part members have been very, very good about observing these general principles that we had. Every once in a while there is some violation of that. That's really a reflection more of the individual giving the statement than it is on the House or the process of members' statements. The chair will protect the integrity of members' statements, give members the widest possible latitude in dealing with this, and ask them to follow some certain principles.

If anybody should be upset for what was said in the House today, it's me. I quote from the Leader of the Official Opposition, "The Tories have been trying to silence the Auditor General for months . . . and distributed in this House a paper by top Tory Ron Hicks that calls on the government to severely curb the powers of the Auditor General." The government did not distribute such a paper to anyone; the Speaker did. The Speaker did because a former member of the Official Opposition, who is now the dean of the department of economics at the University of Alberta, has a student by the name of Ron Hicks in a course to do a public seminar on public accountability. This one individual, Ron Hicks, came to me, because the audience that probably would most likely want to read this paper would be men and women of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and said: I would like, as a courtesy, to provide to them a copy of my report, my paper, prior to the seminar that would be held in I think it's the early part of May in which this matter will be raised as an opportunity to hear it first.

It's not any top Tories that distributed this. The chair did it, and he did it as a courtesy to a former member of the Official Opposition, who has a student by the name of Ron Hicks. So, you know, if anybody should be angry, it should be me, but I'm not going to get angry. I'll still recognize their right to say certain things, but I'm going to repeat what I said before, that was arrived at in consort with a person who I believed had integrity and still has integrity, Mr. Grant Mitchell, who is a former Leader of the Official Opposition.

One of the agreed principles we had was that we would ask all members in the Assembly to deal with the highest degree of civility with respect to these statements, to not bring into question any other member, and to deal essentially with thoughts that they had.

Today's statement was a reflection of the individual, and remember that.

Ms Blakeman: Under 13(2) I'm just asking for clarification on your recent statements just so that I am clear because you repeated it in a couple of different orders. The request to distribute the information that was distributed came from a former member of this House?

The Speaker: No. I never said that. I said a "student."

Ms Blakeman: It came from a student but not from a former member.

The Speaker: That's correct. That's what I said.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the clarification.

3:10

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

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 9
Local Authorities Election Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to make a few comments with regard to Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, in committee today. I want to thank all members who participated in second reading of Bill 9. I appreciate the positive comments during second reading from members of all parties who spoke to the legislation and its measures to achieve fairness and transparency.

Before I respond to specific questions raised during second reading, I'd like to speak about the clarity these amendments will bring to municipal elections. Bill 9 will also address concerns we've heard in conversations with municipal leaders and other Albertans over the last year. They have commended the government for listening to their concerns and responding in a timely manner through this proposed legislation.

Bill 9 recognizes that self-funded campaigns can go up to \$10,000. This provides flexibility in that one size does not fit all, as was suggested by a member opposite. Those campaigns do not have to follow the same guidelines as larger, donor-funded campaigns. For those larger campaigns it sets individual campaign contributions at \$5,000 per year. That means candidates can receive donations from any number of donors. All those donations will be subject to disclosure, and a receipt will be issued for any aggregate donations over \$100.

It's important to note the flexibility for rules around bank accounts, which also recognize that campaigns come in different sizes.

It's also worth noting that there is not a campaign spending limit proposed in this legislation as exists in some provinces and some municipalities. There was a suggestion during second reading debate that we adopt provincial regulations around municipal election campaigns with respect to the carry-over of surplus campaign funds. But as you are aware, Mr. Chair, in municipal elections candidates seek public office as individuals and not as political party candidates. Each candidate has their own philosophy and policies. Therefore, surplus donations are treated accordingly and are required to be donated to charities and municipalities if the candidate is not running for office in the future. This is a fair and reasonable framework for all elected officials and provides accountability for Albertans.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie had raised the question about the requirement for opening bank accounts for candidates. Specifically, he wanted to know whether candidates would be required to open a bank account in their own name rather than in the name of their campaign. Mr. Chair, financial institutions each have individual processes to determine what name is required to open a bank account. That being said, the legislation is workable as it is presently before us today.

Members also raised questions about residency requirements with respect to electors owning more than one home. I'd like to make it very clear that this provision will not affect any voter rights for property owners in summer villages. The proposed amendments will clarify the existing rules that when a voter who has more than one residence in all other types of municipalities other than summer villages, the person's place for voting will be determined on the basis of the following criteria: the home address where the person's

mail is delivered, the address to where the person's income tax correspondence is sent, the address shown on a driver's licence or registries identification card.

This further clarity was required due to a court case in May 2008, when the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled that the election was valid despite 11 voters failing to meet the residency requirements under the Local Authorities Election Act. However, the judge stated that the act does not expressly address the issue of where a voter is to vote when he or she owns or occupies more than one residence. This proposed amendment to the act will resolve that issue. All electors will still have to either be on a voters list or make a statement of eligibility declaring that they are eligible to vote in that election, and an elector's eligibility can still be challenged in the courts, of course, which was previously the case as well.

The definitions in the new legislation also clearly set out what a campaign contribution is, what a campaign period means, and who is a candidate. Bill 9 will clarify that a commercial service does not include services provided by volunteers who receive no compensation in relation to their time or services.

Our election process, as was stated during second reading debate, needs to be open and accountable. This legislation will provide greater consistency and fairness for all Alberta municipalities. Mr. Chair, the proposed changes support the principles of openness and transparency while ensuring practical delivery. Previously it was optional for a municipality to pass a bylaw requiring candidates to prepare and disclose to the public a statement of their campaign contributions and expenses. Now all candidates must file a disclosure statement with the municipality. This ensures consistency in reporting for all Albertans.

In closing, I want to urge all members to support Bill 9 and thank them for their comments. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was beginning to worry that I wasn't actually going to get a chance and be here at the right time to be able to speak to this bill because I'm quite interested in the process and what has happened here. I also see a sort of repeated process or strategy that comes from the government or through the private members who sit on the government side around discussion of issues that affect all of the municipalities in Alberta without a rigorous consultation process that involves them. I think this is the second or third one where that can be argued. We certainly had a situation where last year the 2009 Bill 203 – of course, our bills are all renumbered, so there's now a different 203 – which was around municipal financing, went through the House very quickly and then was proclaimed to the shock of many.

As I looked at some of the things, you know, I went to the city of Edmonton disclosure bylaw, and it is very thorough. It goes on for some 10 or 11 or 12 pages with various attachments that go with it on how and when everything is to be filed, a definition of what is meant by a gift, who is meant as family, campaign expenses, honorariums, how much money has to be itemized, anything over \$300. There was a municipality that in some ways has more thorough campaign finance disclosure rules than we had at the time – there is a bill before us currently – than we have even to this moment for provincial disclosure.

I'm wondering who was supposed to be the recipient of this being put onto the municipalities. Who were they really trying to get at? It was surely painted with a very broad brush stroke. Nonetheless, that's past history. It passed. We now have the amending act in front of us. At least the government recognized that something needed to be done and it needed to be addressed.

Two things are outstanding and I want to make sure are clearly on the record. One is that the larger municipalities have been asking for some time to be able to have legislation passed which would give them the choice of enacting tax-free deduction legislation for municipal campaign contributions – and that was not included in this act – for trying to solicit donations for any of those people that are trying to run.

Let's face it: in the big cities you're not talking chump change. You know, in Edmonton the ward sizes currently are dealing with 120,000 to 140,000 individuals that a candidate is trying to influence to vote their way. That's a lot of money to get things in the mail to them, signs, and all the rest of it to try and make people aware of what you're doing. This is without a party apparatus behind them. So it would be soliciting donations without any kind of an incentive that is enjoyed by provincial and federal politicians but is denied to municipal politicians. I question why that was not included in this legislation, particularly because it's something that has been repeatedly requested.

3:20

The ire of the municipalities over not being consulted was pretty clear, and I probably don't need to go over that again. I think there's another municipal act that's up around franchise fees, and I wonder how much consultation took place around that one. I believe that's also a private member's bill. So I see the pattern being repeated even when the point has been made pretty firmly.

The transparency and disclosure laws. In the city of Edmonton the first one was passed in 1993, and they've continued to operate on that. I did quote to you from it a bit earlier, and I notice that it was most recently revised in 2001. They've kept on top of their legislation, and I think that if I was them, I'd be a little peeved with this sort of Big Brother knows best attitude.

I believe that the audit requirement was addressed in this legislation, which was something else that definitely needed to be looked at. Thank you for looking at the candidate's own campaign funds and allowing that to be brought forward and particularly clarifying the rules around the volunteer and valuing the volunteers' time because, well, certainly as happens on this side of the House, volunteers are really the biggest resource in a campaign. If we had to value their time and not go above a certain limit, my campaign would certainly be sunk on that. So thank you for addressing and clarifying that they are not campaign funds.

As well, thank you for addressing the issues around contributions being viewed over an annual basis rather than on a campaign basis because, as I said, in some of the larger municipalities and cities – Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, for example – I think candidates are trying to raise sizable amounts of money. You usually can't do that in one shot at it, so most of them have some sort of annual fundraising campaign.

I think you got rid of the problem with the surplus. Yeah, you did.

I think those are the issues that I wanted to put on the record right now. Mostly because there seems to be some sort of under-the-waterline battle going on here between the government and the municipalities – and I'm never quite sure who they're trying to get at, who the government is trying to control – I wish that there could be a more consistent approach to this. You know, by far the majority of our population live in urban centres now. To continually go about things where either backbencher legislation, private member's legislation, or government legislation is brought forward without dealing with those people who are representing the majority of our population, who are living in urban centres I think is short sighted and very problematic, so I'm glad to see that at least this bill has come forward which would correct some things.

I'm going to stop talking now because I'm really hoping it's going to get passed today. Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity in getting to participate in the debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, this afternoon. Certainly, I have heard from municipal leaders across the province. I have heard their dissatisfaction with this initiative. When I think of this government's feeble efforts to improve our own financial disclosure statements and the laws that govern those statements, I find it quite ironic that we would serve this legislative initiative on various corners of the province and give municipalities these changes without adequate consultation. I'm pleased to hear, or at least I understand, that there will be amendments to this, but certainly I can only gather that the hon. member heard from the same individuals that I did regarding this proposed legislation and is rightfully considering their opinions.

I don't know what happened, but when you consider this bill and what we're trying to do here with improving the accountability of donations to the municipal level of elections, that's a good idea, I think. But in the future I would certainly ask members of this House to consult thoroughly and diligently with our other partner in government, and that's the municipal level.

Again, Mr. Chairman, we look at Bill 9, and we see the proposed amendments. If we're going to be accountable ourselves, that's fine, and if we ask others to be accountable, that's fine. But when we look at the rules that govern the elections of each and every member of this Assembly, I suggest that we fix those rules first, make some necessary changes to those rules. Let's have a look at our own contribution limits. Let's look at who can give us money. Should we look at eliminating donations from corporations, trade unions, entities that are not on the voters list and just limit campaign donations to individuals whose names appear on the voters list? Perhaps we could do that; that would be one suggestion. Limits on the total amount that can be donated during a campaign or a calendar year: perhaps we should look at that as well. Until we do that, I can understand why municipal leaders are so suspicious of this initiative.

Now, there are those – and I realize this is coming out of another private member's bill – that indicated to me that they thought this was a matter of a dispute between the mayor of Calgary and this government, and this was one way of ensuring that the mayor of Calgary listened to or respected this government more. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not, but certainly more than one civic leader brought that up to me. The civic leaders, regardless of whether they're in smaller centres or larger centres, had a lot of questions initially about this bill, and we'll see if they are satisfied with this legislation as it proceeds.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to get my comments and my observations on the record. Certainly, in the information that has been provided to me and the commentary that has been provided to me by many different people, they don't understand the tone, I shall say, of this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, it's always a privilege to rise and to debate the various bills that this government has brought forward. Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes

Amendment Act, 2010, is one that I do believe needs more debate and more thought put into. As we too often see, these people won't protect our children from pedophiles and other things and they need to get it right, yet they bring forward many bills like this that I question. Did they get it right? Did they consult the stakeholders? I have to say on this that I don't think that it's right yet, that we need to do more thought on it and more research and, certainly, consult the local authorities on this for municipal elections. Why is the provincial government needing to step in? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just referred to this as being an ongoing dispute between the province and the mayor of Calgary and the things that have gone on there. Again, we're trying to limit them.

One of the things, Mr. Chairman, that I always look at when we're passing new legislation and something that I deeply believe is that the proper role of government is to protect our freedoms, not protect us from freedoms. This, to me, is a bill that is protecting the government from freedoms. Overall, I realize the importance of laws and legislation and regulations, but we need to look at, you know, why we are doing this. Again, it's trying to limit those that want to run for office and constrain them in ways that I don't know that we need to do.

It's just a concern to me. It is addressed in here in several places in the bill, and these are areas where I agree. The important thing to me when people are running for office is the reporting of the money that was spent and the reporting of the money that the individual received and who it came from. That part of the legislation I very much agree with. Then after that, though, on the outside, you know, do all these other little details need to be in there that are there?

The area that I'm probably most concerned about is that when you're going up against an incumbent or a new area, often those other people do have a great deal of money. It's interesting. As I look around the world and see some of the great philanthropists, two of the individuals right now that I just have a world of respect for are Bill Gates and Warren Buffet and the work that they're doing in Africa. I think that they'll do more good than many, many nations all together will do with the wealth that they've acquired.

The relationship with Bill 9 here . . .

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Try and get back. It's a long road. Start walking.

Mr. Hinman: Now, I'm surprised. Even you are questioning me on that.

These philanthropists want to do great work. I think that there are a lot of individuals in society who also realize that there are problems in government. They're willing to run. We've had an individual in Calgary who has spent a lot of money that we saw and know what he did. I just see no reason to restrict wealthy individuals who want to fund their own campaign, to say that you can only put out \$10,000. The important thing is that it's accountable and that we know what money is being spent, that other candidates and stuff can counter that, and that it's an open and honest race.

Why? Because if someone has connections or perhaps has given political promises to thousands of people – and maybe only a few, but they have the influence over thousands of people – we can get a hundred thousand donations of \$1,000. Yet if someone who has their own wealth – let's say that Warren Buffett or Bill Gates was living somewhere here in Alberta, and these are great philanthropists and felt, "I could do a good job," and they wanted to spend their money and not ask other people, why would we want to limit them and say, "You can't do that and spend your money"? I think that this is a flaw in the bill that we really need to address.

Again, going back to the principle of what government's basic

role is, I think that is to protect our freedoms as citizens and how we want to interact or what we want to do in a community. That restriction on philanthropists and money: it shouldn't be restricted. Whether they want to spend it on trying to get elected or put a message out during an election, I don't think that that's wrong. What's critical – and this bill includes that – is, in fact, the openness or the accountability of where the money was spent.

On that, Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 9, which amends sections 1(5) and (6)(b). I will wait for copies to be distributed, then.

The Chair: We will pause for the distribution of the amendment. This amendment now shall be known as A1.

Hon. member, please continue on amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am proposing to strike out section 1(5), the candidate self-funded election campaign. Secondly, I am proposing an amendment to section 1(6)(b), which amends the maximum amount of self-funds a campaigner can contribute to their own campaign. The purpose of this amendment is to strike the \$10,000 limit and recognize that self-funding is not a campaign contribution. This means that a candidate can contribute an unlimited amount of money to their own campaign during an election year.

Mr. Chair, some might argue that this amendment excludes a candidate from filing a disclosure statement on the amount to which they fund their own campaign, but this is not the case. Section 147.11(7) and the proposed section 147.4(1)(c) state that a candidate is required to disclose "the total amount of money paid by the candidate out of the candidate's own funds." Quite simply, I believe that if a candidate has enough money to fund their own campaign and wishes to spend over \$10,000 of their own money, they should be free to do so. What's important, though, is that they need to show accountability on where this funding is being put.

Again, when the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking yesterday about the problems of evil and them trying to get in and cause problems, there are also those who are for the good. [interjections] You brought up the constant: we need to be on guard. Again, to paraphrase Edmund Burke, all good people have to do is nothing in order for evil to flourish. To me that's a very true statement. That's what we as legislators come in here for, to try and, you know, increase the safety and the prosperity of our community and to get rid of the derelicts. The people that are causing problems we want to eliminate, but we would not ever want to limit philanthropists and their money and the good things that they want to do in our society. One of those things that they might want to do is run for office.

3:40

Now, I realize that this is a two-edged sword. You can say: well, a corrupt individual can also now spend an unlimited amount of money. That is true. But the important part and why I support the other parts is that the openness and accountability of where that money is spent, to me, is what is critical. The population here in Alberta, we're not ignorant of the facts, and if the information is presented in front of us, I have great trust in the people of Alberta to elect those individuals. Like I say, for those who are running against such a candidate, whether they be good or perceived as bad, the critical point is: are they being accountable on where the funds came from and where they're being spent? To me, we don't need near the restrictions that we see in this bill in saying how much can come in and whatnot.

Again, I spoke also a little bit earlier about it, that, you know, it seems kind of ironic that as MLAs we can receive through the loopholes of legislation \$15,000 a year into our campaign.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hinman: Okay. I'll rephrase that. The way that the legislation is written, an MLA or someone who wants to run to be an MLA can receive \$15,000 a year from a contributor. [interjection] Yes. It's the regulations. We can call it what we want, but we write the regulations to have those things allowed, so why would we not allow that at the municipal level? Especially on the fact that many municipal people run in a much larger area than we ourselves are running to represent, yet we're restricting the amount of money that's coming in to them.

I just feel that we need to take a couple of steps back and look at the reality and realize that one shoe doesn't fit all. Let's at least be fair. If people can contribute \$15,000 to a political party that can then be directed to an individual's campaign and \$30,000 in an election year, why would we limit someone at the municipal level and say, "Well, we're allowed to, but you're not"? I see that as a little bit hypocritical in that area, so I'd like to level the playing field and ensure that all people have that.

Once again, the purpose of this amendment, though, is to ensure that someone that wants to give back to their society, they don't want to ask other people to support them, they've been very blessed, they're wealthy, and they'd like to run and to put that choice forward to the people in our community – I think it's critical that we accept this amendment and go forward and realize that this will actually enhance and perhaps allow people that want to run that otherwise wouldn't because they're not going to go out and ask people to make those contributions, yet they themselves would be willing to give of it. We should allow this.

I'll sit down and listen to the response on this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've had the privilege of serving at both the provincial and the local level, and I'm going to speak a little bit about this amendment, particularly (b)(1.1), the addition of "money paid by a candidate out of the candidate's own funds for the purposes of the candidate's election campaign is not a campaign contribution," et cetera.

In fact, I think the hon. member that spoke is looking through the glass at the wrong end. It is not important to conduct an election for the benefit of the candidate. It is important to conduct an election for the benefit of the voter and for the voting public, and the voting public can be highly influenced by a disparate display of how the candidates are presented.

Mr. Chairman, if the one that has been privileged to invest a million or several funds on their behalf has been able to saturate the media in such a way that they have been able to get elected and the other candidates have not been able to get that same display of media influence, at the end of the day if the one with the greater display of influence through the media or any other source is able to get elected, you are ill advised as another candidate to cry foul, especially if your voting capacity has been that much less. Challenging the vote at that time is going to be very difficult to do because, obviously, the one that has had the most influence in the media has been able to display that they have won.

Then it could be construed by the voting public that the only person or persons that will be elected are those that are able to fund that kind of an election. What the hon. member is suggesting is that the only thing that's important is how you display how you dealt with that money. But when a candidate comes forward and presents that money, as long as the candidate presents that money, it opens the door for the candidates themselves to gather all kinds of monies from their friends and family and put it through because where that

source of money has come from is not important in this amendment. Rather, what this amendment suggests is that as long as I put it forward as a candidate, that's all that matters.

I think what we're trying to do is not establish a playing field that benefits the candidate. We're trying to establish a playing field that benefits the electorate in such a way that the electorate is free to choose, unfettered by undue influence which, in my view, this amendment suggests.

Mr. Chairman, I've gone through several elections time and time again from 1977, over 30 years' worth of elections. It could be too long. But one of the things I'm going to tell you is this. At the local level – and all politics are local – they look very carefully at how clearly one displays how they present themselves.

I think there would be huge distaste if a philanthropist or anybody else with excessive means was able to saturate in a way that others could not to the local media or to the voter. I think they would be offended, not necessarily just by that candidate's capacity but by the people like us that would enable a rich person, regardless of where those funds have come from – a rich person – to better their lot in life or their influence over the electorate over anybody else. That, Mr. Chairman, in this democratic society runs contrary to all the moral and ethical principles that I've always understood good government prevails to provide.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly do want to speak on this amendment, that's put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, because I found much to object to in his speech, quite frankly, and I find much to object to in this amendment.

I share a municipal background with the hon. minister of finance. We served in municipal government in the greater Edmonton region at the same time, so my experiences are similar to hers. Having dealt with some of these issues myself over the course of four terms on Edmonton city council, I can tell you that this amendment would in fact make the situation very, very difficult.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore seems to believe that it is inherently preferable to have people with great wealth representing the citizens in a municipal council and perhaps also in other orders of government. He talked about people who are blessed to be wealthy, that we want them to serve and so on, and then in the next breath he talked about eliminating the derelicts. I don't really know what he meant by that, but it certainly didn't sound good to my ears because I might be considered by some here to be a derelict to be eliminated.

I have fought all throughout my political career for the right of ordinary people to participate in our political process and to represent the ordinary people who elect them. It's something that I find, you know, is very much part of the reason that I got involved in politics in the first place. Everybody from all walks of life has a right to participate in politics and to be elected to political office. In fact, it should be encouraged. Many occupations are overrepresented in politics, lawyers being the most obvious example. There are fairly few lawyers among the population, but there are lots of bus drivers, there are lots of nurses, there are lots of teachers, there are lots of construction workers, there are lots of workers in the arts, and they do not have the same level of representation in the halls of power in whatever order of government you're looking at.

3:50

What the hon. member is proposing and what he is saying gives a huge advantage to those people with wealth because they get a special exemption. They can spend their own money and as much of it as they wish, but people who don't have that money cannot

because they are restricted in their ability to raise funds by the rest of the restrictions in this act, which, in my view, are justified. It creates a special advantage for those who have considerable wealth.

This is based, quite frankly, on the system we have right now in the United States. This is exactly the exemption that exists in the very limited sorts of restrictions and regulations of campaign financing in the United States. The issue of money has ruined American politics and has turned it from something that once represented the people of the United States into something that is beholden to special interests, where politicians spend almost all of their time raising money and in which people with great wealth call the shots. The exemption around personal contributions has led to the case in the United States where most of the politicians in that country are millionaires or billionaires.

I think I saw a report that showed – and I may be overstating this slightly but not by much – that almost every single member of the United States Senate is a millionaire or a billionaire. The ordinary people of that country have been excluded from the political process because, as the hon. minister of finance was saying . . .

An Hon. Member: Intergovernmental affairs.

Mr. Mason: Oh, sorry. They switched them, didn't they? Yeah, intergovernmental affairs.

She said, you know, that money has a real influence on the results of elections. You just have to look at them over there and us back in this corner to realize the importance of money in elections. That's why it's an important part of democratic reform to start trying to level the playing field so that it's the ideas and the character of the candidates that determine the results and not the people that support them.

What I want to say in the strongest possible terms is that I believe that we should reject this amendment. This is an antidemocratic amendment that is dressed up in the rhetoric of democracy, and it's exactly the opposite of what it purports to be. This is freedom for millionaires, and it is undemocratic for the rest of us.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all hon. members to oppose this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to speak very briefly on this amendment. I don't want to extend this debate, actually. I think it's really important for the municipalities that we pass this bill. Really, this is a special exemption but in drag, if I may use the vernacular of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, because that's what it is. It's purported to help everyone but really just helps a very few people. To me the essence of democracy is that the elected representatives are a mirror to the people in our society. This amendment would make it very, very difficult for a number of individuals in this Assembly to be able to get elected.

To me it is a sign of your success as an individual member to be able to get other people to support you financially. Frankly, I've never put any money into a campaign because I think it's about whether I can garner that support from outside, and if I can't, then I don't deserve to be here. I find unlimited self-financing really just opens the door to have this become an even more exclusive enclave than it is. The likelihood that we would have gender representation, racial representation, religious representation in this House, even differences of sexual orientation, becomes much more muted than what we already have. I would argue that what we've got here is not exactly a mirror holding up to our current society.

So I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly some interesting discussion being brought forward and some need for some clarification. I think that I would start off that very much the reason why I've brought this amendment is for the public good. I believe in a level playing field, so I guess the question that one would have to ask, with the discussion that's going on here, is that if someone has worked hard, has been ingenious in his area and earned a lot of money, and they've said that, well, your punishment is that you're not allowed to use it.

You know, in some parts of the world it's very difficult to have a choice on a vehicle. "No. This is the only one that we build. This is what you have to have." Whereas, in North America people with wealth have been able to chose and buy as they please.

It's limiting freedoms that I'm speaking about. It's interesting that the minister of intergovernmental affairs has said that, you know, it's not in the best interest of the people. I would very much take that on the other side. It's the other way around. We want people to have that opportunity if they so can. I didn't say that the money didn't matter. It very much matters, and receiving money from people and then using it in your campaign without declaring it would be against this act. So it wouldn't be family members and stuff giving people money and being able to put it in that way. The tracing of where that money came from is critical – it's in this bill – and it's also critical where the money was spent. I don't think that she's accurate on that.

I find it very interesting, especially sitting on this side. I think that if you go back to my first election that I ran, people said: "Oh, you can never go up against the big Tory party and win. It's just an impossibility. Don't waste your time. Don't waste your money and other people's." So I ran a campaign that was very fiscally responsible and was able to win. It's not all about money.

The hon. member also mentioned, and I agree, that people are astute. If we have someone that people consider corrupt or they don't appreciate the way they're spending a lot of money, I don't believe that our local citizens are so foolish as to say: "Oh, this is wonderful. We'll vote for him."

If you actually go back and look through the municipal records, there have been a lot of individuals who have spent an awful lot of money compared to other ones, and they weren't successful. It's not all about money. I've never spent more money than those that I've been up against, referring to the government, the Tory-nominated candidates. So you can't say: oh, look how much money they spent, and they won. I do very much agree with the idea she says: well, you know, if they spend enough money and they saturate the airwaves and the paper and everything else, what chance do you have?

If, in fact, this government really wants to do something and we want to create a level playing field, then what we should do is pass legislation that actually limits the amount of money that can be spent on each citizen that you're trying to get votes from. That would make far more sense to me, to ensure there's a level playing field, to limit it and say, "Well, you can only spend \$5 per voter," rather than saying that you can't spend your own money. Again, it's looking at the situation and what the real problem is here.

I guess perhaps it was a poor choice of words when I used the word "derelict." I was thinking more of a huge ship that's taking on water and sinking and is not being of a lot of value than of the human nature. What I mean is those people that are less than quality citizens. People realize that, you know, there are some shady deals going on. Like I say, I don't think that the citizens are so naive as

to not be able to detect that, especially when there's an obscene amount of money being spent on a campaign. It doesn't mean that they're necessarily going to get it out there, yet it's important that often we can put out a message to the people. So I just don't see that that's needed.

Again, talking about the undue influence of the money being spent by a party, I mean, we can just look at the provincial elections and the enormous spread between the amounts of money. So if, in fact, we want to do anything, let's limit it, then – you know what? – to the lowest common denominator. We check with each candidate and say, "How much money do you have to spend?" and limit everybody to that. That wouldn't be the freedoms that we want. It's, like I say, a concern to me.

4:00

The other thing is that I did not say: those with great wealth. I said those that had great wealth, the opportunity to use it if they so desire. I am not an individual of great wealth. Again, I came in; I ran on very tight budgets to get in here. There are those with money who might want to try and buy the airwaves. There are those that, you know, want to put in the effort, the sweat equity, to actually meet the people they're representing. Who should we choose? I believe it's those that have put in the sweat equity, that they meet at the door, that they know. I think that's represented by many of the people in here. They didn't get in because of the amount of money that they spent. It's because of the people that they met, the concerns that they were able to address, the sincerity of the individuals, and the ideas that they had to solve the problems of the people that they met with. I believe in a free and democratic society. That would make the difference. One of the benefits of municipal elections is that people know when those dates are coming up, so they can campaign on that. It's an area to look at.

I think that my motion has been taken in the wrong way. This fear that someone that has more money is going to beat me: I don't think there would be too many people in the opposition that would even run if that was the case because of the intimidation of the war chest that the governing party has in each of their constituencies as well as the deep pockets that the party has as a whole. Like I say, if spending money is wrong and we're saturating the airwaves and everything else, then we should look at legislation that actually limits the amount of money that a campaign can spend on the citizens that actually have the ability to vote, if that's what we're wanting to look at is caps. Perhaps that is something that's of value to look at to ensure that we have a level playing field.

That's really what this is all about, a level playing field, yet not saying that. Too often we have this mentality. I believe in raising the bar and having a standard, but I have a real problem on lowering the bar, saying that we have to lower the bar and prohibit this from going over. That's what we're doing. We're lowering the bar for individuals that may want to spend their own money on what I call a very worthy cause. Let the citizens make that decision.

Full disclosure is the key. Where did the money come from? How is the money spent? Again, the most important thing when it comes to municipal elections, provincial elections, and federal elections is the accountability clause. Here again, to me, the major flaw that we have with democracy here in Canada is that there is no accountability or next to zero accountability after someone is elected, that day after they can change their colours, they can change their party, they can change whatever they want, and there's no accountability to the people. [Interjections]. That would be correct.

What we need is recall. I'll always campaign on recall and accountability. Eventually one day I believe that that law will come into effect here in the province of Alberta.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: There's so much noise that I couldn't hear you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We are talking about amendment A1, that you introduced.

Mr. Hinman: That is correct. Some people are caught up in movie actors and things, and that's fine, but we'll get back to: do we want to limit the freedoms of individuals? If we want to limit them, the real way is accountability, and that is about how much money is spent, where it's spent, and where that money came from. That's the important part in this area.

I'll listen to see if there are any other questions that people might want to bring forward on this, and we'll have the question.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A1, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Now we go back to the bill, Bill 9. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a few comments with respect to this. I've also had discussions with municipal officials who have had concerns with this particular piece of legislation. I want to just raise a few questions.

I think one of the issues that is clarified, that I think is very important, is the question of volunteer work provided to a candidate. In my view, political campaigns ought to be based not on money but on the work of volunteers. Someone who works for their community and is consistently trying to improve the quality of life for the citizens and to improve the communities that they represent is most likely to have people who are prepared to come forward and work on their behalf. To allow any suggestion that volunteer work has to be assigned a value and calculated on the books and limited in some way by legislation I think is wrong. So I want to say that I particularly think that's an important aspect.

The limit on campaign contributions I think is very important. I want to say that the biggest problem, in my view, getting back to the question of money and its corrosive influence on politics, that I have seen is money from the development industry in municipal politics, especially in the big cities. The development community has millions, if not billions, of dollars at stake in decisions of municipalities. For example, a simple zoning decision on a piece of land can increase its value four or five times, so there are huge financial stakes for developers and landowners in municipal politics.

Now, I believe municipal politics is mostly about land. It's mostly about land and its uses, its plans, and services to property. So it's natural that those that have great financial stakes in those things would pay a great deal of attention to it. Not having limits on campaign contributions gives a disproportionate amount of influence to developers in terms of municipal politics, and I think we ought to go further than this bill does and eliminate developer financing of municipal elections altogether, and I think you can eliminate lots of other sources. We've certainly taken the position at the provincial level that corporate donations as well as union donations should be eliminated, that contributions should come from individual citizens and citizens of the jurisdiction. So having an opportunity to limit campaign contributions is very important.

We've already dealt with candidates' contributions to their own campaigns. I certainly think that the limit that's included in this

piece of legislation, this act, in terms of individual contributions to your own campaign is still too high, but it leaves a question of what you do with deficits once you've run a campaign, and I'm not convinced that the bill deals with that adequately. With respect to that, I think that there were some things in the previous bill that created the concern in the first place. It was Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Act, 2009, which was passed, and it was perhaps a little bit hasty.

4:10

I think that by and large this act corrects the problems that existed there, but I do think that it's very important for democratic reform in our province and elsewhere that we establish some real, clear principles about election financing, we recognize the role that finance plays in the outcome of the political process, and we make sure that it's based on citizens rather than on special interests and that everyone in the public has a clear idea of who is contributing to whom.

Provincially I don't think we're there yet in this particular piece of the legislation. We still have, for example, a failure of the government to deal with the whole question of leadership campaign donations. We've got the situation where the Premier and the minister of finance – I mean the real minister of finance; I don't mean the minister of intergovernmental affairs this time – have still not completely disclosed the sources of their funds from their leadership campaigns, nor has the leader of the Wildrose Alliance been prepared to disclose where she got her money from in terms of her leadership campaign. This is a huge loophole, and it will allow special interests to get in there and in an insidious way, and you never know how they've influenced the decision-makers. That's something that has to be dealt with.

In my view, in the end putting some overall spending limits on campaigns, as has been suggested by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, is probably a good idea. That levels the playing field even further. But in the meantime we certainly don't want large, large contributions from special interests to dominate it.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that on balance I think that this bill repairs some of the errors that may have crept in when the Legislature adopted Bill 203. I'm pleased to see that the government has been listening to municipal governments. I do believe very, very strongly that the municipal order of government needs to be respected and consulted when any changes affecting its operations are made. That didn't happen in Bill 203, and I regret that very much, but I think that that aspect has been corrected by the government in bringing forward this bill, Bill 9.

As a result, on balance I think that it's a step forward, and I'm prepared to support it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for the time.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would appear that there's going to be more debate and perhaps more amendments to this bill. In the interests of making progress, I would move that the committee now rise and report so we can move on to some other items.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the

Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 9. Mr. Speaker, I'd wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: All agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act.

The Speaker: Should we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 2

Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow I wish to move third reading of the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

The Speaker: Additional speakers, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 3

Lamont Health Care Centre Act

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Call the question?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:17 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to April 15, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]
- 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft., adjourned)

204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)

First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	783
Members' Statements	
Calgary Chinatown Centenary	784
Government Accountability	784
Lacombe Ford Atom A Rockets, Lacombe Curb-Ease Pee Wee A Rockets	785
Kevin Koe Rink World Curling Champions	794
Katharine Hay	794
Parkinson's Awareness Month	794
World Health Day	794
Oral Question Period	
Health Services Executive Bonuses	785
Health Services Executive Pensions	786
Occupational Health and Safety Compliance	786, 787, 789, 792
Cataract Surgery	786, 789
Chateau Estates Access Road	788
Income Support for Emergency Housing	788
Employment Supports for PDD Clients	789
Long-term Care Funding	790
Child Intervention Services	790
Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program	791
Arts and Culture Funding	791
Royal Alberta Museum	792
Health Professions Scope of Practice	792
Rural Physician Recruitment	793
Access to Laws and Regulations	793
Notices of Motions	795
Tabling Returns and Reports	795
Tablings to the Clerk	796
Projected Government Business	796
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010	798
Private Bills	
Third Reading	
Bill Pr. 1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act	804
Bill Pr. 2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010	804
Bill Pr. 3 Lamont Health Care Centre Act	804

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