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Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
 Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
 Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. David Mulrone, Canada's ambassador to the People's Republic of China. China is Alberta's second-largest export market. We share a vibrant and multisector trading relationship. Most recently China has become another key investor in our province's energy industry.

Alberta is very pleased with the strong working relationship we have with the Canadian embassy in Beijing. Ambassador Mulrone and his staff do an admirable job in promoting Canada and Canada's priorities in this very important marketplace. We appreciate all the good work as well as their co-operation in the Alberta China office, which is co-located in the embassy.

I had the pleasure of spending some time with the ambassador around noon today. His knowledge and his commitment to helping Alberta and our interests are very admirable, and his knowledge of China and the Asian marketplace is very impressive. He's seated in your gallery. I would now ask our honoured guest to please rise and receive the tremendous warm welcome from this Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a grade 7 class from Menorah Academy, who will be here later. I just want to get their name on the record in *Hansard*. They'll be here with their teacher, Steve McGowan, from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They've been taking a tour of the Legislature and will be experiencing the excitement of question period a little bit later. I'd ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly before they get here.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of young, enthusiastic constituents. There are 80 grade 6 students from Fox Run school in Sylvan Lake. They're seated in I think both galleries along with their teachers and parent helpers. One of the classes is a French immersion class. I always enjoy it when constituents of mine tour the Legislature and sit in on question period. I think it's even more important for our young Albertans to attend, and it is always a pleasure to welcome them here as they will be our leaders of tomorrow. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here seven very outstanding students who are visiting us from the Aurora Learning Foundation along with two of their teachers, Barb Raymond and Jessica Skinner. This is one of the many outstanding schools in my constituency, and I'm so proud that they are here. Could I please ask all of you to rise in the gallery and the rest of us to greet them with a thunderous applause for the Aurora Learning Foundation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very special people, two of my bosses from Athabasca-Redwater, Dawn Minns and Sheena Pacholok. I'm very blessed that these two ladies run my constituency office. I've always found that if you want to be successful, you surround yourself with the best people you possibly can, and I'm blessed with that. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three special people, and I'll ask them to stand as I say their names: Mary Phillip, Janessa DeCoste, and Shirley Johnston. Mary and Janessa are both employees of the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Calgary, and they have been for a total of five years. They are in the Edmonton area for training and upgrading at the Stollery children's hospital. Accompanying them is my lovely wife, Shirley, of 36 years. I'd like you to give them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 volunteer first aid responders from St. John Ambulance. Each of these volunteers served over a hundred hours in 2009. I'll be discussing their efforts more in depth in a member's statement shortly. For now I would like to call upon these volunteers to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. With over 100 hours we have Alison Craik, Michael Halliwell, Jason Raymond, Dan-Christian Yeung; with over 200 hours we have Monique Romeo, Kyle Young, Jessica van der Ahé, and Ingrid Sebes; with 387 volunteer hours we have Mr. David Romeo; with 512 hours, Melanie Peters; finally, with a remarkable 638 hours we have Mr. Dean Smith. I would ask them all to receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Balwinder Singh Fidda. Balwinder is a recipient of the prestigious Arjuna award, the highest award for an amateur athlete bestowed by the government of India, for his accomplishment in kabaddi. Albertans may recall the sport of kabaddi when it was showcased for

the first time as part of the centennial celebration right here in Edmonton during the 2005 Masters Games, which was hosted by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, who was then the minister of community development. Balwinder is seated today in the members' gallery and is joined by a number of my constituents. Please rise as I call out your names: Mr. Jarnail Singh, Mr. Charn Dhaliwal, Mr. Parmjit Sanghera, Mr. Laddi Padda, Mr. Karamjit Gill, Mr. Paul Atwal, and Mr. Tony Thind. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

St. John Ambulance Volunteers

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak more about the outstanding St. John Ambulance volunteers I just introduced. Volunteers have such an enormous presence in this province. Each year approximately 1.2 million Albertans volunteer their time and energy for various events and organizations across the province.

The volunteers with us today from St. John Ambulance have all individually volunteered as first responders for at least 100 hours this year. In 2009 St. John first aid response teams provided over 6,000 hours of direct first aid coverage and treated some 342 patients. This number of hours does not reflect the thousands of hours volunteers commit to learning and maintaining their medical first responder skills necessary to provide care.

As a former health and safety professional myself I am so thankful that we have this level of injury support here in Alberta. These skilled and dedicated volunteers provide a valuable and essential service to our communities. I want to thank all those who volunteer for St. John and, in particular, those who are here with us today. Your dedication, hard work, and community-minded spirit help countless Albertans in need.

Thank you.

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

Occupational Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 Albertans will recognize the National Day of Mourning for workers who have been killed, injured, or developed diseases at the workplace. Sadly, the Auditor General's latest report shows that this government has done little to offer workers a safer environment.

The report condemned this government for lax enforcement of occupational health and safety rules, finding that 63 employers repeatedly broke those rules and got away with it without punishment. One hundred and ten noncompliance orders from OH and S inspectors were suspended without justification; others were never followed up at all. Some of these bad employers even continued to receive rebates off their WCB premiums despite injury rates three to four times the provincial average. To make matters worse, the government won't publicize the names of bad employers with bad safety records, keeping workers from making informed decisions about where to seek employment. As usual, this government rewards incompetence.

1:40

Eight years ago the Official Opposition proposed an amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act which would have forced the minister to publish the names of employers with the best and worst safety records in the province. That amendment would have

made it a lot harder for some of the employers mentioned in the Auditor General's report to escape their moral duty to their workers and their responsibilities under the law.

The AG's report also revealed that out of 5,700 new cancer cases identified yearly in this province, as many as 760 could be work related. This government should immediately commission a thorough study of the effects of workplace carcinogens on Alberta workers. Furthermore, this government should also legislate mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees. Alberta is one of the few provinces without one. Finally, this administration must recognize the rights of paid farm workers by protecting them with access to workers' compensation and coverage under OH and S. Alberta workers deserve protection.

As we prepare for the day of mourning, I hope this government will at long last take action. Thank you.

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

Safety and Underground Facilities

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April has been designated in many jurisdictions across the continent as digging month. No, this does not mean that you should go out and dig your garden, but it does mean that if you are going to be digging for whatever reason, you need to take proper precautions to ensure that all buried facilities in the vicinity of your proposed excavation are marked and exposed if you will be digging in close proximity to those facilities.

Alberta has a very comprehensive and complex underground infrastructure that provides essential electricity, natural gas, communications, water, and sewer to our homes, businesses, and industries. The inadvertent failure of one of these buried lines can be costly to repair, cause considerable inconvenience, and cost millions of dollars in lost production. In addition, the person or operator who strikes one of these facilities can be exposed to serious injury or death from explosion or electrocution.

The Alberta Damage Prevention Council is dedicated to minimizing damage caused to underground facilities from unauthorized contacts and is mandated to promote safe working environments for all agencies involved in development and construction. When an individual or organization is planning any ground disturbance, they must contact Alberta One-Call in advance of construction to have all buried pipes, cables, and other facilities marked on the ground to ensure that they do not come into contact with those facilities, causing damage to the facility and/or danger to themselves. There is no cost for this service; costs are borne by the individual utility companies.

As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, or it's better to be safe than sorry. Be safe: call Alberta One-Call before you dig.

Thank you.

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

Workplace Health and Safety Awards

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 I attended the workplace health and safety awards. Eight employers were honoured for their work in making their workplace safe for their employees. This year's winners in the category of workplace health and safety innovation were Northern Platforms Ltd. for the NP sampler, a device that allows the worker to gather a sample from a truck-trailer without climbing on top, and Colter Energy Services Inc. for the wellhead access safety platform, which allows safe work during wellhead completion.

This year's health and safety leaders were Edmonton Exchanger and Champion Technologies. Both are organizations that lead their industry with top-notch health and safety management practices and proven injury and illness prevention records.

Health and safety performance improvement winners that reduced their workplace injuries and illnesses are Pollard Banknote, Swamp Mats Inc., Van Houtte Coffee Services Inc., and St. Michael's Health Group. I am very proud that St. Michael's Health Group is from my riding of Edmonton-Manning, Mr. Speaker. The names of the employees at St. Michael's who received awards are Ed Hladunewich, the board chairperson; Kay Willekes; and Lynne Connelly. They employ 320 people and are a great asset to the community.

All of these companies are worthy of recognition because they are good examples for other employers to be able to make the entire province safer for working Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Democracy and MLA Representation

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to sit in this Legislative Assembly representing my constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. It's ultimately the principle of our democracy. However, yesterday I was visiting senior citizens in my constituency and having a coffee with some of the seniors. A senior citizen of many years, late in her life, brought me two articles that she read in both the Calgary and Edmonton newspapers, and she said she often reads the *Hansard*, which I complimented her on. It concerned her, she said, that democracy could potentially be in peril. She said: "It's an Alberta value. It's a value where MLAs get freely elected to come and represent the voices that elect them in their individual constituencies." She thanked each and every one of the men and women who serve that value.

However, she asked: when does an MLA say no to the pressures that perhaps are put on them from the discomfort of deviating from an Alberta value? She says that MLAs will go back to their constituencies in not too long to listen to their constituents. However, she said: are they willing to brave the future relative to the discontent they are asked to bring to this Legislature? She said: few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues in order to speak out on behalf of this democracy that we represent, our constituents. She said: I thank the men and women who have not forgotten that Alberta value in representing the constituencies and the electorate that they elected in the very home of the constituencies that we represent.

This lady is over 80 years old, and I thank her. It's a reminder to us all for that important Alberta value.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

George Lamouche

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During this National Volunteer Week we recognize the contributions of individuals who generously give their time and energy to our communities. Today I want to recognize a special individual from my constituency who has not only contributed tremendously to our community in his lifetime but has succeeded in reaching a remarkable milestone. In his 101 years Mr. George Lamouche has been one of the integral movers and shakers in dealing with Métis settlement independence. An elder from Gift Lake, George provided sage advice and volun-

teered endless hours of his time to move along the process which made the Métis settlement accord a reality.

While his volunteer dedication deserves recognition in itself, his greatest achievement is probably a more personal one, his family. George and his wife, Maria Ward, raised 13 children and many of their grandchildren as well. If the secret to aging gracefully truly is to never lose our childish enthusiasm, then George has the right idea. He has a remarkable 202 grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren.

With family and friends at his side this centenarian celebrated his 101st birthday on March 11, 2010, at the Gift Lake Métis settlement. To live past a century seems impossible. To reach 101 years and still have the wit, kindness, and determination to push for things that Métis people need deserves recognition. Congratulations, George, for reaching an incredible 101 years still jiggling and for all that you have done in your life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Did the hon. member say 202 grandchildren?

Ms Calahasen: Yes. He was prolific, Mr. Speaker.

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're not quite at 1:50, but I've received a letter that I'd like to share with all Members of the Legislative Assembly. The letter is addressed to me, and it comes from the retiring pages.

Mr. Speaker,

As another session comes to a close, we face the regrettable reality that many of us will not be returning in the fall. We would like to express our gratitude for the wonderful opportunity we have been provided to serve in the Legislative Assembly.

We would like to sincerely thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Table Officers, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the women in [Room] 315, the Security staff, and all the other staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. Of course, we would be remiss not to thank all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly as well. All of these exceptional individuals have contributed to the tremendous experiences we have each enjoyed.

Being on the floor of the Chamber has presented a unique perspective that very few others will ever experience. The knowledge and understanding that we have developed about the institution of Parliament and the functioning of democracy has been invaluable. Furthermore, the enriching experience of working alongside a diverse group of people, each dedicated to improving our province, means we leave as more informed individuals with insight that will undoubtedly assist us in our future endeavors.

1:50

The relationships we have forged, the memories we have created, and the skills we have developed are priceless. As we have grown in this environment, our appreciation of this opportunity has grown with us. From our encounters with the influential men and women who help shape our province to firsthand participation in important ceremonies, we will take these experiences with us for the rest of our lives.

It has been a great honour and privilege to be able to work with everyone in this Assembly, and for this, we are greatly appreciative. Yours sincerely,

Conor Smyth, Justin Forth, Andrea Bailer, Alexandra Bennett, Alexandra Candler, Abigail Huyser-Wierenga, Edward Davies, Rayleen Nicolajsen, Motiejus Osipovas.

Isn't that a wonderful letter? [Standing ovation]

Ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, I'd like to ask the Deputy Speaker to make a brief presentation.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Deputy Speaker I would like to draw to the Assembly's attention that we will send off nine wonderful pages at the end of this session. They are Abigail Huyser-Wierenga, Alexandra Candler, Alexandra Bennett, Andrea Bailer, Conor Smyth, Rayleen Nicolajsen, Edward Davies, Justin Forth, Motiejus Osipovas. I ask you to join me in recognizing the great efforts of our pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out the task with attention to duty and in good humour and suffer some very late nights to work with us.

On behalf of all members I present to each departing page a memento gift. These gifts are from the personal contributions of every member of our Assembly. Along with the gifts are our best wishes. We are honoured to have our pages work with us in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Now I would like to ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to hand the nine gifts to Justin Forth, the Speaker's page, representing the nine departing pages.

Oral Question Period

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

Public Accounts Committee

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Public Accounts Committee is one of the most important ways taxpayers have to gain a public accounting of how their hard-earned money is being spent. Given the public outcry over the recent decision to introduce veto power over the chair of Public Accounts, we have heard that your government is reconsidering this change. To the Premier: can the Premier confirm that this change will be reversed at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee is a committee of the Legislature. It does not report to the Premier or to government. It reports to this Legislature. It is within the committee to make any recommendations or changes that they see fit with respect to the operation of the Public Accounts Committee.

Dr. Swann: Well, then, given that the Premier's own House leader said that this action was taken to slap the wrist of the chair of Public Accounts, will the Premier reverse that decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the committee itself sets its rules and guidelines, and any change that they may want to make to the operation of that committee is within the purview of the committee.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, I would like to ask the Premier, would he say yes or no? Was he involved in that decision?

Mr. Stelmach: If it's in the purview of the committee, I won't be involved because I'm not a member of the committee.

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

Water Allocation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing from across Alberta that this province needs a plan to help Albertans with water

shortages now and into the future. I'm concerned that this government will continue with its fire, ready, aim philosophy, simply reacting to crisis instead of planning for it. If I were Premier, I would have implemented a proper water management framework, including accurate measurements, conservation, and storage in case of emergency, with human consumption the first priority. To the Premier: given that this is shaping up to be one of the worst droughts in years, how will this government's reaction be different than it has been in the past?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: we are heading into one of the driest years on record, perhaps. Perhaps. To those in the agriculture industry, obviously, a concern. We haven't lost a crop as yet in April ever in my memory, but we have to be careful as we proceed. There are some issues with respect to pasture for cattle. I would submit that every Albertan has a responsibility to conserve water. It's not only good for the environment but in the end it's also good for their pocketbook.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is facing a drought now, how can the Premier continue to dither implementing a new water use strategy?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government has been very open and sincere in our commitment to bring forward a water allocation policy that not only respects the historical water rights that individuals have but that provides for adequate opportunities for increased population and economic development. We remain committed to bring that plan forward this year.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, I'd like to put this question to the Premier because the province is looking for leadership, Mr. Speaker. The continuing drought will mean more people competing for less water. How can the Premier continue to defend an antiquated first in time, first in right principle that removes power from Albertans to control the use of their own water? To the Premier.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, first in time, first in right is a long-standing tradition in law in this province. As I indicated, the issue that we need to deal with is: how do we allow for increased population, increased pressures on water supply and still respect the long-standing traditional rights of licence holders? That is the essence of the water allocation review which is upcoming.

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

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this government has undermined the authority of Public Accounts, disparaged the office of the Auditor General, and is now submitting its own 200-page report to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Clearly, in the name of transparency and accountability it was inappropriate for the government to present a position when it has no reason to do so other than blatant political interference. To the Premier: why did the government, which does not represent a constituency, submit a proposal to the Electoral Boundaries Commission?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Boundaries Commission is an arm's-length commission, and all MLAs have an opportunity

to present to the commission the views and the wishes of their constituents. In this particular case what had happened is that two members presented to the electoral commission the collated, collected presentations from what MLAs heard from their constituents in terms of some of the splitting of particular community leagues, et cetera, and that came forward yesterday.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, who decided the Deputy Premier should present a 200-page submission to the Electoral Boundaries Commission? Did this come from the Premier, one of the political ministers, or the Tory party executive? Who?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this is about something that I did last night, first of all, I want to say that I will not apologize to anyone about doing my job. There was a line in one of the documents that was submitted with the compilation of all of the MLA submissions that did say "Government," and I apologize for that. My letter to the commission clearly indicated that this was a compilation of what our members had heard from their constituents. I also made it very clear in my opening comments that it was exactly that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. Deputy Premier for that apology and recognition of his error.

I'd ask the Premier: why does this government continually attempt to undermine and disparage the institutions set up exclusively to ensure accountability, transparency, and democracy in our province?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there was no interference, and there was no attempt by anyone on this side of the House to interfere with the decisions of the commission. You know, sometimes these allegations come from some members of the opposition. I note that there were a number of opposition members that made presentations, and I know that it was done on Legislative Assembly letterhead. It's funny how we have a letter . . .

Mr. Horner: On my letterhead.

Mr. Stelmach: . . . on his letterhead, yet the opposition can use their own letterheads and that's okay. That's fine for them, but it's not fine for this member.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I didn't use any letterhead.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Electoral Boundaries Commission heard submissions from several individuals. One of these was a presentation authored by the Deputy Premier. This 207-page document contains, in his words, "recommendations made by Government Caucus in response to the [Electoral Boundaries Commission] Interim Report." In our view, the submission of this document by the government calls into question the integrity of what is supposed to be a fair and nonpartisan process. To the Deputy Premier: why would he place the commission in the untenable position of having to respond to a partisan submission from the very government that appointed it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, with the last boundary commission, which was in place, I believe, in 2004, many MLAs, myself included, made presentations after the interim report was put out so that the boundary commission could hear from people who represent constituents in those ridings, to hear what the response and the feedback was. Last night my colleague and I presented what was a compilation of the same kinds of things from members of this

Legislature on our side that have been out talking to their constituents. We compiled it and put it into a binder for the ease of the commission's work that they have to do.

Mr. Anderson: You're the Deputy Premier, not some backbench MLA.

To the same minister. Given that the presentation came from the office of the Deputy Premier and minister of advanced education – that's you – and given that government resources are not to be used for partisan purposes, why would this Deputy Premier use government resources to prepare and submit what is obviously a very partisan document? Your letterhead, sir.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the letterhead of the leader of the NDP with an address to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I have a copy of a letter from the Member for Calgary-McCall constituency to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I have a copy from the office of the mayor of Grande Prairie in response to the interim report. The point that I'm making here is that I did write a letter on my letterhead as the MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. I also made it very clear to the commission that this was a compilation of what other members have brought forward to ease the members of the commission's work.

Mr. Anderson: Keep digging, Minister.

To the Premier: since his government and Deputy Premier have placed the commission in a very compromising position, will he do the honourable thing and ask that the submission by his Deputy Premier be withdrawn so the commission can conduct its important work without undue political pressure and influence from this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the commission is independent. It is chaired by a very respected Provincial Court judge, retired. It has two members appointed by the government and two appointed by the loyal opposition. They are all members of integrity. They're there to hear the submissions and make the decisions based on what they hear from Albertans, and in some cases various MLAs brought forward their constituent concerns to that commission. That commission is neutral, and it will make the best decision in the best interests of all Albertans.

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

Combustion Technology in the Oil Sands

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the oil industry has a new plan for the oil sands. They want to set them on fire. That's right. Excelsior Energy wants to set underground fires in Alberta's oil sands as a way to liquefy underground bitumen so that it can be pumped to the surface. This land is rich with oil and coal, and setting it on fire could result in an environmental and economic catastrophe with grave implications. Will the Minister of Energy put a stop to this ludicrous application now, before industry sets the oil sands on fire?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what this guy is talking about. You know, I do have to come back, though. I'm not sure who this member is getting his information from, but I can tell you he's not getting it from his union leaders, that typically want to support this hon. member and this party, because those members of

those particular trade unions want to see development in the oil sands so they have jobs, not like these two sitting in the corner over there.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister states the obvious, and that is that he doesn't know what's going on. Given that I have in my hands a release from Excelsior Energy that says that they wish to deploy a proprietary in situ combustion bitumen recovery process at its Hangingstone oil property, can the minister tell us whether or not he is prepared to allow this company to start underground fires in the oil sands and whether or not he's considered the implications of this process or whether he is unaware of that as well?

Mr. Liepert: What I assume is happening here is that a private-sector company – and let's be clear in this House, Mr. Speaker; there's incredible innovation in technology that is being deployed in our oil sands today. We have a company that has made it known that it would like to apply to the Energy Resources Conservation Board, which examines all of these technologies to determine whether or not it's in the best interest of Albertans. I would suggest that this fear that this member is trying to spread is way premature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the only thing I'm afraid of is that this minister doesn't know what's going on, I ask him whether or not he will use his authority under section 18(1) and 18(2) of the Oil Sands Conservation Act to prevent the approval of such a scheme, that could place not only the environment but Alberta's future economic prosperity at risk, or whether he's unaware of his own act as well.

Mr. Liepert: What I will commit to, Mr. Speaker, is to let the process unfold as it should. There is an independent Energy Resources Conservation Board, which has a lot more expertise in examining these kinds of proposals than that particular member has, and I would trust them before I'd trust him.

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

Highway 63

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I drove highway 63 today, like the 40 or 50 times I do. Some citizens asked me this yesterday for the Minister of Transportation. The question that was asked by citizens was this. Why were work crews removed from highway 63 in the Grassland area, where no work has been seen being done? As well, not one piece of equipment for over 450 kilometres has been seen. Where is the equipment? Where is the work?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has been around here for years, and he pays no attention to what's going on. If he absolutely knew what was going on – we went in there. Actually, we worked 24 hours a day for a while because we had to vacate it during the migrating birds situation, and we can't go back in till July 15.

Mr. Boutilier: Given that the migrating birds are getting in front of the 400-tonne trucks that were there last year, that the member took off the road, I have to ask the question: do you really believe, through the chair, that migrating birds are the reason why you're not doing work on highway 63 for the workers that travel that highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, now I'm going to add one more thing for the hon. member: it's also calving season for the caribou, and we're not allowed to be in there during calving season for the caribou.

Mr. Boutilier: I have to ask: given these comments about animals, I want to know if the Minister of Transportation is actually running a zoo.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's about how intelligent this hon. member is. We have to follow the laws and the rules and regulations in Alberta. Absolutely, when we are told that we have to shut down our construction – we're widening a road – because we're in the area where we have protected species of caribou, we can't go in there. I'd love to be there doing the work. We work 24 hours a day for this member's constituents, and we will do it again.

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

Water Allocation Licence Amendments

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing real challenges for long-term sustainability of water for human consumption, including drinking water and for agriculture and industry use, but the minister is going ahead with changing the policy on the irrigation districts to allow redesignation of water, something that will remove any need to consult with government or the public forevermore. To the Minister of Environment: given that this is a precedent-setting decision, does this signal that a decision has already been made on the future of the entire water allocation system?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it certainly does not. In this particular instance there was a policy that was established about a year ago that allowed for very, very restricted reallocation of the licence within an irrigation district's purview so that they can continue to provide the needs to municipalities and to small industries within their area where there is no access to water. This is simply the next step, an application under that policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: what exactly are the circumstances, the criteria in which it is appropriate – the minister's own words – to allow irrigation districts to redesignate water, and will he table that criteria in this House?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'll be more than happy to table it. It's a policy that was developed in consultation with stakeholders, as I said, about a year ago. I don't remember the exact timing. This particular application is under that policy, and it will be considered. There is opportunity for the public to have input, to make comment, and we're going through that process as we speak.

Ms Blakeman: Well, according to his remarks in *Hansard* from April 13 on page 725 he talks about changing the policy. "We will be changing that policy." Now he's referring to a policy that has already been changed. Could the minister clarify his comments, please?

Mr. Renner: I'd be more than happy to. At the time that the member asked me the question, I couldn't recall whether or not the policy had been actually finalized. I knew that discussions had taken

place. What the member is referring to is an application under that policy. That policy is in place now, and as I indicated, I'll be providing that member with a copy of the policy.

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

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday an hon. member raised questions that successful bidders in the Alberta Health Services RFP for ophthalmology surgical services are trying to get out of their contracts. These questions cause concerns for the public and, in particular, my constituents. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister been able to find any evidence to support these allegations made by the hon. member, and are any of the contracted surgical facilities trying to get out of those contracts?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence to that effect whatsoever. I'm just short of asking the member from the Wildrose Alliance to apologize for those false rumours, those very, very hurtful allegations that they were making. The fact is that Alberta Health Services immediately contacted every one of the four winning-bid facilities, and all of them unanimously said that they are fulfilling their contracts. They will be there as specified in the RFP. I hope the Alliance takes a lesson from that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: does the Mitchell surgical centre, one of the successful bidders in Calgary, have enough capacity to provide services even though they're undergoing expansion right now?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is very confident that the number of eye surgeries that were allocated to the winning-bid facilities can and will be accomplished inside the facilities as they exist today. It's true that there are some expansions going on, but that is not related directly to the way in which the RFP was confirmed nor to the way in which the contracts were awarded. There is every confidence in the system. Let's be very clear. The RFP, such as it was conducted and such as it was awarded, was based on current capacity at the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the minister address any issue related to those facilities that were unsuccessful in the latest RFPs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that will be done very soon, as I indicated in the House a few days ago. We will follow through with that because very soon along with Alberta Health Services I will be announcing the second blitz, as was promised when we announced the first blitz for additional surgeries back in February. During this second blitz, that will come out very soon, there will be a variety of surgeries, and that will include hundreds of eye surgeries. Those facilities that won the bid or those facilities who didn't win the bid can be given every consideration under that process for surgeries in their facilities.

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

Wetland Policy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's wetlands compensation guide is weak: weak systems, no monitoring, no controls. The ministry has created a system with one organization responsible for restoring wetlands destroyed by development, and according to the Auditor General the Department of Environment still can't manage to monitor restoration standards or how taxpayer dollars are spent on the program. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why does the minister continue to put Alberta's wetlands restoration at risk by applying this weak, lacklustre approach?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is inaccurate in saying that the province has allocated all of the wetland restoration to one organization. The fact of the matter is that there is only one organization because no others have come forward. If they come forward and can demonstrate their ability to reconstruct and to redevelop wetlands, then the opportunity is there for any others. Our wetlands policy is one that, as the member well knows, is in the process of being updated to reflect the current needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, given that the Auditor General has stated that there are no controls in place, no one in the ministry responsible for monitoring wetlands restoration, and processes in the ministry's outdated guide are not even being applied, how can the minister determine if the current processes are effective?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we do have a responsibility for ensuring that the dollars that flow through to organizations such as Ducks Unlimited are fulfilling the requirements. I think what the Auditor General was getting to is: is there a direct correlation value for the dollar? Frankly, that's difficult because it is more expensive in some locations than others. You have to buy the land and do the restoration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: when will the minister release an updated wetlands policy for the whole province that includes a no net loss policy? Mr. Minister, children who were born at the time the current interim policy went into place have now graduated from high school.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've answered that question numerous times in the House. The updated wetlands policy is under construction as we speak, and there's a commitment on my part to bring forward that policy for further consultation as soon as we've got it complete.

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

Pediatrics for Kids in Care Program

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues and I on the front lines have had the misfortune of seeing much suffering on the front lines. The most vulnerable in our society are children.

Children and youth coming into the care of the provincial government often do so from unfortunate circumstances which contribute to their poor physical, emotional, and mental health. My first question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Are the children and youth being properly assessed by the appropriate health care professionals after they come into care in order to ensure that they receive the necessary wraparound services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year and a half ago the Calgary child and family service authority in partnership with Alberta Health Services, the Southern Alberta Child & Youth Health Network, and community pediatrics came together and established a program known as pediatrics for kids in care. It's an excellent program. We have 15 pediatricians in Calgary who see children and youth that come into our care within eight to 12 weeks, which is quite remarkable. I want you to know that it's the first of its kind in Canada, and it has been highly successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. We strive for evidence based on outcomes-based decisions. You speak of successes. What performance measurements does your ministry have in place to evaluate the outcomes of this initiative?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the program is a year and a half old. I can tell you that there have been over 600 children within that time that have received assessments from pediatricians. The assessments cover a wide range of that child's health care needs, but more importantly that assessment then becomes the foundation for a health care plan where there are family physicians and pediatricians, the case worker, support workers, different people involved with the health care plan. The best outcome, I think, is that the emotional and physical needs of the child are being met and they're being unified . . .

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

2:20

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I'm glad that you've helped the vulnerable children in Calgary through this program. When do the children and youth in care in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark as well as other constituencies in the capital health region and rural Alberta get their health care needs met?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, one program that this member might be interested and maybe even participate in because he is a physician is an excellent one through the Edmonton child and family services authority. That program is for high-risk youth, where a physician will go to the emergency shelter and look after the health care needs of the youth on-site. Also, with the Stollery children's hospital pediatrics we co-locate our staff there. Also, this pediatrics for kids in care program is being modelled for other areas of the province.

Special-needs Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, funding cutbacks are causing boards to eliminate segregated programs for special-needs students. This government's flawed school closure process has targeted a school

for complex learners in Calgary-Varsity. With concerns growing, the government can only gesture to a review of special education two years in the making. Parents, students, teachers, and staff need answers now. To the minister: what does the minister have to say to parents concerned that special-needs students are being pushed into traditional classroom settings prematurely?

Mr. Hancock: It would be quite inappropriate to do so, Mr. Speaker. We have a special-needs review process which has been under way for some time. It's been under way for some time because it's a very important area. We've had extensive consultation. We're now working to do the collaborative processes between health, education, children's services, and then we'll work again with school boards and stakeholders and parents to design the implementation process. This is something that's particularly important, that every student be included in the education process, and it needs to be done right.

Mr. Chase: Special-needs funding has also been frozen for two years. Given the developments in the Calgary public and Edmonton Catholic boards will the minister release any details about his plan for special-needs education, or will he continue to hide behind his ongoing review?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we are actively engaged in the process of getting internal policy approval, and as soon as I have approval to move forward, we will be obviously including the same people and more who were included in the discussions leading up to the setting the directions task force report. That will happen, I hope, very quickly.

Let me be perfectly clear. Nothing is going to change overnight. This is a change in culture relative to moving from a diagnostic process to a learning-needs-based process. It's going to involve a lot of work, and it has to be done right.

Mr. Chase: I hope that when it finally gets done, special ed children will be protected.

Why is this minister spreading even more uncertainty by publicly musing about getting rid of the evaluative practice of coding without indicating what the new system will be? Clarify.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I try to respond to questions when they're put to me, whether we're in this House or elsewhere. People have asked about coding. As late as at noon today on the inappropriately named *Wildrose* program on CBC I spoke directly to the question of coding. The fact of the matter is: we're not getting rid of coding necessarily; we're moving the funding model and the special-needs model to an all-inclusive model. It requires work. Students will still need to be diagnosed. There still will need to be health professionals involved, but they won't necessarily drive the learning process.

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

Sodium Hydroxide Spill

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned about a caustic soda spill that occurred last week in our area. While the community affected is grateful for the support they received from the government, some have raised questions about the response time and the cleanup. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is Alberta Environment's role in the cleanup of this spill, and how quickly did his department respond to the issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were advised of this incident through the Coordination and Information Centre and had our staff on-site within an hour. Our role really is twofold: one, to ensure that all environmental and public safety concerns are effectively addressed and, secondly, to ensure that cleanup meets the strict environmental standards. Now that the emergency itself is over, our role becomes one of monitoring and ensuring that those standards are met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister please clarify for my constituents: what is caustic soda, and what are the dangers, short- or long-term, that it poses to this community?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, caustic soda is also known as sodium hydroxide, and it's a substance with very high pH levels. It's a base as opposed to an acid. It's industrially used as a chemical base to manufacture products like pulp and paper, and in fact it can be a very dangerous chemical. That's why we took it so seriously. It could cause a chemical burn with direct contact and inhalation.

The spill was contained to an open roadway. Again, no adverse environmental impact or human concerns were or will be on an ongoing basis once the cleanup is complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was also involved, can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please clarify for my constituents which department or ministry actually takes charge on an issue like this? Specifically, whose responsibility is it to communicate to adjacent landowners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All municipalities have emergency response plans in place and activate them when necessary. They are the ones that are responsible for resident information. They're the ones that are responsible for notifying their residents. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency helps municipalities prepare these plans, and they help them test those particular plans. All responses concerning spills must adhere to our provincial and federal environmental laws. In this case Environment was the lead.

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

Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The regional advisory council for the lower Athabasca River had their final meeting almost two months ago. Last April the former Minister of Sustainable Resource Development suggested that there would be opportunity for public comment when the report was complete. In estimates the current Minister of SRD said that the advisory council's work was complete. My question is simply this: why hasn't the minister released the report yet?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the program and the process of the land-use framework has been very well advertised and understood by most people. The regional advisory commission has

completed their work, they're working on a draft of the proposal that they're going to give to government, the secretariat are working with them and assisting them to finalize that document, and at that point in time we will deal with it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the regional advisory council was supposed to be pretty much the only multi-stakeholder forum for considering the environmental impacts of different levels of extraction and given that that report was given to government two months ago, will the minister admit that his refusal to publicize this report is nothing more than yet another stalling tactic and . . .

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

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, look, the process is well understood by everybody that's involved in the process, and I believe that the hon. member opposite would understand it as well. The process works like this. When I receive the completed documentation from the regional advisory commission, we will then design a land-use plan, and the land-use plan will go out for consultation. At that point all of the public have an opportunity and all of the stakeholders have an opportunity to comment on the plan before it is finally developed for cabinet.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the regional advisory council report is the only opportunity for stakeholders to have input, will the minister or will he not release the report before it is watered down by cabinet and the land-use framework ultimately developed?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I seem to be having a bit of difficulty of getting the member to understand. There's a process in place. What does RAC mean? It means that it's a regional advisory committee. They are giving advice to the government. It's not a consultation process. As I explained, the consultation process will take place. Once the plan has been in its initial stage of development, it will go out for consultation at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Alberta Treasury Branches

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers of Alberta guarantee Alberta Treasury Branch deposits of \$23.8 billion. There's no room for mistake or mismanagement. To the minister of finance: why has the minister allowed ATB to mismanage the start-up of its new banking system to the point where it is now \$140 million over budget and a year behind schedule?

2:30

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've already spoken, to the public record, that I'm not pleased at all with that result, a cost overrun of that magnitude. I'm requesting a full report from ATB as to what happened and what's being done to prevent it from happening again.

I would point out to the hon. member that the Auditor General has noted that ATB is already taking steps to correct some of the problems they've experienced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Speaking of the Auditor General, the office of the Auditor General has 14 outstanding recommendations for the Alberta

Treasury Branches, including one on risk management, one on senior management bonuses, one on internal audit programs, and one on internal control weaknesses. Why has the minister of finance failed to deal with these 14 outstanding recommendations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we're dealing with all of them. We accept all of them. But I would remind the hon. member that we manage the relationship in terms of strategic direction for the Alberta Treasury Branches. I don't think he or anybody else in this House wants us to get back into the micromanaging of internal decisions of Crown corporations. We're not going there. We want operational independence for ATB.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the board of directors is appointed by this government. We have \$23.8 billion in deposits that are guaranteed by the taxpayers. They have to be protected. Again, why has the minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. I heard two questions there. Deal with the first one. We're moving on.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've met several times already with the chairman of the board. We've discussed these issues. We've accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations. I'd remind the members opposite that the Auditor General – they're not playing get-you politics the way you guys are pretending. The Auditor General makes recommendations to improve systems. There's always room for improvement. We accepted the recommendations, and that's what we're doing.

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

Water Supply and Snowpack

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the below-normal snowpack feeding Alberta's river basins this spring, many Albertans, and particularly farmers and ranchers, are concerned about the soil moisture conditions. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. While recent precipitation in southern and eastern parts of the province has improved the immediate soil moisture conditions, I'm interested to know where we're at with the snowpack forecasts and what we can expect in terms of runoff for river basin water supplies, particularly in southern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it comes as no surprise to you that our water supply and snowpack are generally below average throughout the province this year, particularly well below average in the snowpack feeding the Oldman and Bow River systems. I do want to remind you and all members that precipitation recently experienced in southern Alberta and, historically, over the next couple of months will really determine whether we have a situation that will become very, very troublesome or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking advantage of water storage opportunities is particularly important in times of water shortage. To the same minister: what measures are in place to ensure Albertans' water needs are met for agriculture, industry, and people needs?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we do have a series of provincially run reservoirs that help to store water. These reservoirs are at close to normal levels for this time of year, and tools are in place to increase the level if it's necessary. During dry periods these can be strategically used to divert or release water to maintain flows for human, aquatic, ecosystem, and agricultural needs. I think it's important to note that the water levels as we see them this year are far better than they were in the drought of 2001, so we do have plenty of opportunity to manage beyond now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What programs are in place to help agriculture producers deal with impacts of water shortage, should they occur, and are these also available to producers operating on public lands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of programs available, but I think that an important point the Minister of Environment pointed out also holds true for our irrigation canal systems and our storage areas. We don't anticipate any problem this year with respect to that. Our levels are high. We do have Growing Forward water management specialists that will work with producers with respect to their water needs for their livestock, and there are a number of risk management programs that are in place. We are also waiting for a response from the federal government at this point for coverage on the AgriRecovery program.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I've just obtained new information with regard to the bonus system at Alberta Health Services. It turns out that 500 Alberta Health Services managers are eligible for what they euphemistically call pay at risk. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many millions of dollars are Alberta taxpayers at risk for if all 500 bonuses are paid?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very torqued and distorted question. The fact is that under the new system we have standardized contracts, and in actual fact the people at that higher income level don't even get the full range of pay that they're eligible for unless they perform the specific benchmarks and meet the measurements that have been set for them.

Dr. Taft: Well, given that most people understand that as doing your job.

Given that pay at risk translates into automatic bonuses unless you mess up, and given how many mess-ups there have been in Alberta Health Services, can the minister tell Albertans if any managers at all have not received their bonus for the past fiscal year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I do not manage those managers, but what we'll find out from Alberta Health Services, who does manage them, is an answer to that question.

Dr. Taft: Well, given the minister manages all kinds of other decisions of Alberta Health Services, will the minister confirm that the new standardized severance package for Alberta Health Services managers who lose their jobs is 12 months' pay plus a 15 per cent bonus?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the bonus part offhand. I'll have to look into that. But I can tell you that the amount of severance has been brought down significantly from what it once used to be. It is in fact capped at the max of 12 months, and people find that to be very competitive with other multibillion-dollar organizations across this country. It's what's necessary in the industry to attract and retain the very best people to manage this multibillion-dollar situation in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Wildfire Update

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend there was a surge of fire activity across this province, especially in my community of Whitecourt, where we saw a major fire break out. SRD staff did a great job attacking this fire by ground and by air. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. These fires are expensive. We're 20 days into the budget year. I understand you've burned up your whole budget.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, what's happened here is, of course, we have two parts to the budget relative to wildfire containment. The \$90 million in the first part of that budget is to put people out in place across Alberta to do exactly as the member has indicated: to get on those fires, control them early. That part of the budget has been spent. We are now into looking at additional money from the sustainability fund, as we do annually, to apply to Treasury to manage the rest of the fire season.

Mr. VanderBurg: Given the situation and how dry it is in parts of this province, are you able to make the proper rules and regulations for the thousands of weekend warriors that come on quads and motorbikes out into the forest areas? What are you going to do about them?

Mr. Knight: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, that, again, is an excellent question. It is a situation that we do try to control. What we're doing is go out with advertisements. You see them now. You see the FireSmart. You see the 310-FIRE signs around. What we're doing is asking Albertans to be very aware of what they're doing when they're out and about in Alberta forested areas and to be responsible with respect to any fires that they may have started.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. Previous ministers have embraced the FireSmart program and then got communities ready and willing to help out with the problem. What are you doing to promote the FireSmart program?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I'm doing is responding to the FireSmart people that came to my farm, in fact. It is an ongoing program, a very valid program. It is being funded through alternate sources this year. Nevertheless, it is a good program; we will continue it. Again, I must emphasize that we need the co-operation of all Albertans with respect to this issue. It's an important issue for us all.

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

2:40 Womanspace Resource Centre

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 25 years the Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge has helped destitute

women. Provincial agencies, service providers, including my office, have referred clients to Womanspace for assistance in free ID clinics, interim rent, and, certainly, interim damage deposits, teaching financial literacy and management. The closure has triggered a shortfall of services to Lethbridge citizens. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that Alberta has not much more than a . . .

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I know that our ministry has offices located in Lethbridge that are there specifically to help people out. We have offices there that will help people out with their AISH with their PDD and with the office of the public guardian. I know that we provide these services. I'm not quite sure what that question was, but I do want to assure people that if there is a gap because of the closing of an agency that has done wonderful work in Lethbridge, we are there to help and support the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. One of the points that I didn't get out was that Alberta doesn't have much more than a desk and a chair for the status of women.

My next question would be to the Minister of Service Alberta. Will the minister explain how her ministry plans to deal with the fallout of the closure of Womanspace Resource Centre since photo ID is issued through her ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this to the House's attention. While Service Alberta does not provide grants or funding to community organizations, one of the things that we are working very hard on with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is the whole issue of identification cards for homeless and transient Albertans. We also have a wealth of resources to assist individuals in the area of renting, so we're there to assist when we can.

The Speaker: Don't look surprised, hon. member. Thirty-five seconds, no preambles. Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Oh. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how is your ministry prepared to fill in the gaps left by the closure of Womanspace as a helping partner for your parent link family violence prevention and family and community support services in southern Alberta?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what a loss for your community, hon. member, and I know you're a strong advocate for women. The Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge has been known, as you said, for 25 years to empower woman through the provision of workshops and forums providing information referrals and resources for women. What I will do as the minister responsible for woman's issues in our government is write to my federal counterpart on behalf of the agency to ask that they reinstate the funding that you're inquiring about.

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

Medical School Spaces

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An inspirational young Albertan from Calgary-Lougheed is applying to the University of Calgary's medical school. He's very concerned that there may not be a space for him if the university goes ahead with proposed cuts. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. At a time when many Albertans are struggling to find a family doctor, are you allowing universities to cut critical spaces at provincial medical schools?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I don't believe that any student should not continue forward with the application process that they have. It's premature for any institutions to be talking about those kinds of cuts because we're still working with the institutions on the exact amount of funding for their entire programs for this year.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. Some might suggest it's unavoidable that targets need to be set for new doctors. Can you assure Albertans that you, indeed, will meet them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are on record saying that we will continue to strive to meet the targets that we've set. As an example, for doctors that was 295 new doctors graduating from our postsecondaries, and that's still the target we're setting.

Mr. Rodney: My final question to the same minister. I've heard from constituents that they're concerned about accountability, a possible double standard about whether or not you're not actually setting a similar target for nurses as well. What's the minister's answer to that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've worked very hard with Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Employment and Immigration on the health workforce action plan. We're going to continue to do that and continue to work with all of the facilities and the departments. Again, our target for nurses was 2,000 graduating; our target for LPNs was a thousand. We're going to strive to meet those targets.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. In all 19 members were recognized, 114 questions and responses. Nine of these came from the Liberals, the Official Opposition, four from the independents, six from the government caucus per se.

In 30 seconds we will continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Alberta One-Call dated March 29, 2010, which I referred to in my debate on Motion 508 yesterday afternoon.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate amount of copies of a letter. I tried to do this yesterday; I had the wrong copy, unfortunately. This is from Larry Stowards. He was denied Blue Cross coverage because of some pre-existing conditions even though he had had that same Blue Cross coverage for many decades with the city of Calgary. A real tragic situation.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, during Oral Question Period on April 14, 2010, regarding the incident at Suncor Energy's Strathcona refinery on March 15, 2010.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Evening Sitings

17. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2010 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, amendments offered with respect to this bill? We are on amendment A2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just as a reminder to anybody that's catching up with us here, amendment A2 was an amendment to remove the section that gave the powers to the Chief Electoral Officer to insert fictitious names into the voters lists that were supplied out to candidates. The issue that I had raised around that was that it made it very hard for small and volunteer-based campaigns that really made a concerted effort to locate people that were on voters lists. In constituencies like mine, where people frequently move within the constituency, we would continue to pursue trying to find someone and, unfortunately, could likely spend quite a bit of volunteer time in a 28-day campaign – so you can't exactly be leisurely about this stuff – trying to pursue someone that would turn out to be nonexistent. I had felt that that was a particular hardship placed on small campaigns.

2:50

The sponsoring member, the Minister of Justice, was kind enough to come in and speak to it in which she had pointed out that this was a fairly common practice, that it was being inserted particularly to try and deal with electronic distribution of voters lists as a way of being able to trace back on that electronic fingerprint or footprint, if you want to put it that way. It still doesn't help me. I still think there has got to be a better way of injecting that electronic fingerprint into the distribution of these lists over the Internet or by, you know, recording the list onto some other kind of electronic distribu-

tion method, like the little key fobs and things like that. I still think that something needs to be done to fix this problem, so I continue to support the amendment that is on the floor, although I appreciate the minister coming in to put her clarifications on the table. I think this is a very, very imperfect way of doing things.

We seem to be caught right now in between that kind of electronic world, Internet world, and the plain old volunteer-based foot traffic, hard copy version of things in our election campaigns. I'm just seeing that turn up everywhere. As I explained to somebody the other day, you know, when I first started, I used to produce one paper version of my annual report, which was then sent out in the mail. Thirteen years later I'm now producing one hard copy version, which is still sent out in the mail, but I also have a website, which has to be updated once or twice a week with new information, which is why I talk so much in this House. I also am now doing an e-zine, which goes out about once a month unless there is a really big issue, and then it goes out more often. I'm also doing Facebook postings and, well, Twitter for those that get involved with that.

What was a way of sending out information in one paper version has now extrapolated itself. Nothing ever gets dropped. It's not as though we can stop doing the paper version, so everything just gets added onto. Those two worlds don't seem to be reconcilable at this point. Because we cannot drop the paper version of it and the volunteer-based approach to campaigning, I'm continuing to lean on the government to find some other way to do this than inserting fictional names into our voters database.

There are some other issues that I would like to talk about, but they are not specific to this amendment, so I will resume my seat and turn this over to one of my colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to speak in favour of the amendment. I have listened intently to some of the members who have spoken on this as well as read their comments in *Hansard*. I, too, am of the belief that having fictitious names inserted into an electoral list leads to much more waste of time on behalf of individuals in campaigning and campaign teams and people who are hitting the phone banks when these processes are already difficult enough.

I represent a downtown riding in Calgary, and this riding is subject to much turnover. Between one election and another there can be upwards of 50 per cent turnover in the area. People are essentially younger, more mobile, and come there to either start their lives and/or finish playing out the string in my riding, so you do have a tremendous amount of movement. With that, any kind of deviation from a standard list, which is generally very incomplete and generally will be hit and miss at best, just adds insult to injury in the process.

I know that when we were using the electoral list in the campaign last election, really for our riding it was not very useful at the best of times. Coupling that with the addition of fictitious names, I believe, would just add to more of a nightmare. Further, if they're really looking to clamp down on electoral fraud, there are always other ways to do it other than slipping in fictitious names.

Anyways, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity. Having spoken in favour of this amendment, I encourage all other members of this House to do the same.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Chair, I just briefly want to discuss it again. I understand the concerns of the Member for Edmonton-Centre, but I just want to say, once again, that in this information age protecting lists is critical. No other solutions were brought forward in order to protect the electoral list, and I feel that it is critical. I appreciate that this is going in, and I guess my comment is that, if anything, we should perhaps be raising the penalty or what's going to happen to individuals that are caught using these lists illegally. But I'm against the amendment, in favour of the bills that exist in that we need to be able to ensure the integrity of our lists in not being misused. I'm voting against this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Other members wish to speak?
We'll call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back speaking to Bill 7. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on Bill 7 in Committee of the Whole. As representatives from our caucus have already outlined, there are a number of concerns with respect to this piece of legislation, most of which focus on what it doesn't do, the many problems that it fails to address, and the very small "c" conservative approach it takes to ensuring that we deal with the clear problems that we have in Alberta with respect to, among other things, voter participation. I'd like to perhaps start my discussion on this issue by introducing another amendment to this bill. I think what I'll do is just have it distributed first and then speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is delivered. Hon. members, this is amendment A3.

I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to please begin.

Ms Notley: Thank you. This amendment is a motion I'm moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 4 in the proposed section 4 as follows: in subsection (2) by striking out "may" and substituting "shall" and then, further, in subsection (5) by striking out "a breakdown of results and a summary of costs" and substituting "a breakdown of results, a summary of costs and recommendations to improve future elections."

3:00

The reason that we are proposing this amendment is because we are attempting to convince this government to acknowledge and respect the recommendations made by the previous Chief Electoral Officer, who was suggesting that future CEOs provide information to the public about voting in an effort to address low voter turnout. The previous Chief Electoral Officer, the Chief Electoral Officer who was not reappointed by a majority vote of the Legislative Offices Committee, that was not unanimous, had recommended that someone should have the obligation to encourage people to vote. Unfortunately, when it brought forward this legislation, this government steadfastly refused to acknowledge or incorporate that recommendation.

What this amendment would do, of course, is that it would compel the Chief Electoral Officer to promote voter turnout and voter

participation. It would also compel the Chief Electoral Officer to make recommendations after each election, by-election, plebiscite, senatorial vote to recommend improvements should they be necessary. The idea is that the Chief Electoral Officer is tasked by legislation with the objective of always trying to improve our system of democracy and always trying to enhance the level of participation in our system of democracy. I know that it's a revolutionary concept; nonetheless, it is one that many people who are kind of fond of democracy think would be a good idea and at this point remains absent from the proposed piece of legislation.

Why is this something that we need to focus on here in Alberta? Well, as has been mentioned numerous times in this Legislature but just can't be said enough, we had a voter turnout in the last election of roughly just under 40 per cent – 40 per cent of Albertans. That means 60 per cent of Albertans did not bother to cast their ballots. The vast majority of those who did not vote were young Albertans. Research shows that if you don't vote in your first one or two elections, the likelihood of you ever voting goes down, which means that the long-term prognosis for our province's democracy is that voter turnout will continue to go down unless significant action is taken to reverse that trend.

Now, just to be clear, let's look at what the average is across the country. The averages range from, you know, highs of 80 per cent in some jurisdictions, but the average across the country, even including the dismal results in this province, is slightly over 60 per cent. I think that people in this House should be very embarrassed and concerned about the fact that our voter turnout in this province is so low.

One of the reasons why this is a concern, of course, is that our recently appointed Chief Electoral Officer, one who was not appointed unanimously by those involved with the appointment process but one who was appointed by a majority of members that happened to correspond with the government caucus, has publicly stated that he does not believe it's his job to promote democracy or increase voter turnout, which, again, I find absolutely shocking. I find it shocking that the government would have appointed someone who believed that was his role. The head of elections doesn't think it's important to have more people involved in elections? That's sort of like saying that a CEO of a company doesn't think it's important to have more people buy their product, unless, of course, you're trying to undersell your product for some reason, which appears to be the case here.

Interestingly, when that Chief Electoral Officer stated that he didn't believe it was his obligation to increase voter turnout, he actually pointed to the oh so neutral and objective observations of one Preston Manning, who has also advocated that it ought not to be the role of the Chief Electoral Officer to encourage democracy.

Mr. Hehr: He also said that he wasn't going to take his pension.

Ms Notley: He may have also said that he wasn't going to take his pension. I'll believe it when I see it, frankly.

Anyway, the bigger concern that I have, really, is that all of that mirrors a movement that you see in the United States, which goes back to the early '90s under that brilliant political adviser Karl Rove, who, of course, was behind that guy who has since been collectively described as the worst president in the history of the United States. Their view of how you ran politics was to get as few people voting as possible, to reduce your voter turnout as much as possible so that your radical right-wing folks, who are really motivated, will come out to the polls. Then they have more sway and more ability . . .

An Hon. Member: They don't want that now.

Ms Notley: They may not want that now because, of course, we have a new home for the radical right-wing voters, I'm reminded by my colleagues not even across the way, just directly in front.

Nonetheless, the reality is that that's what the genesis is of that notion, that what you do is you don't get moderate or progressive people to be interested in the political process. You keep them away as much as you possibly can from the political process, and then you get the extremists, who typically are on the right, to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence in their vote.

That is the model used by the George Bush administration in the U.S. all through the '90s. It's not at all a surprise to me that someone like Preston Manning would advocate that we don't take many steps to increase the rate of voter participation in Alberta. But I would say that it's really quite disturbing that we would think to actually adopt that approach to our politics in Alberta. I don't think that's in the best interests of Albertans. I don't think that's in the best interests of so many key issues that we need to deal with in this province.

I think that there is much to be gained by enhancing the participation of all Albertans to ensure that we come up with the best solution to whatever the problem is based on the greatest number of opinions and inputs that we can possibly solicit. Yet, clearly, that's not what this government wants. Clearly, they want to keep people home if at all possible. That's why we have a Chief Electoral Officer who steadfastly refuses to engage in activities geared towards increasing participation.

The amendment that we are putting forward today would simply, as I said before, compel the Chief Electoral Officer, despite his reluctance, despite his respect and affection for Preston Manning, to actually engage in the promotion of democracy in our province, to actually increase the number of people who will cast a ballot. That's what this amendment would do.

I heartily encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment and take a much delayed step in addressing what is becoming a long-standing problem in our province with respect to our democracy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's indeed a privilege to be able to speak in favour of this amendment. In the words of Victor Hugo: greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come. This is one of those things that really is a good amendment. We have here a situation in Alberta, that the hon. member brought up, that shows the dismal state of our democracy. We have a low voter turnout, 41 per cent, for reasons sometimes unbeknownst to us. It just is what it is.

Needless to say, any work that this Legislature can do or an office of this Legislature can do to promote and extend democracy, to encourage both young and old to make it out to the polls, to pay attention to this Legislature, to understand the workings of government, to understand what bills are being brought forward, and to take an interest in how democracy is working and how our government is performing I believe would be a good thing. It seems to me to be logical that our people in charge of elections would be those who would carry out that work for us, that those people in charge of instituting our elections would be the people who would develop democracy days or things of that nature in this province and go out and advocate for individuals to participate.

3:10

That's why I like this amendment. It says that the Chief Electoral Officer not only may but shall actually promote democracy in this province. That means actively work to get people to take their democratic responsibility to heart and make it out to the polls.

It really is amazing that we as a Legislative Assembly hired an individual who claimed that that is not his responsibility. Now, it was a committee of this Legislature that did it. I will point out, however, that it was a majority government committee that did set the wheels into motion for this. It just seems strange that we would hire a person for this job when they didn't believe that actively promoting people or engaging and encouraging people to get out and vote was his job. However, that being said, it happened.

Maybe individuals who hired him, recommended him for the job, or individuals from the government side said: "Listen here. We're going to hire you, but let's not worry about this democratic participation thing. Let's just keep things the way they are, and everyone will be happy. Well, at least we'll be happy. We'll go forward like that." I don't know if it was said in the interview process or when he met before the committee of this Legislature to get his position as the Chief Electoral Officer, whether he said that he didn't think promoting democracy was his responsibility. However, needless to say, a couple of weeks after he got the job, he did state this. I thought this was awfully weird.

What this amendment is trying to do is rectify this unfortunate thing that has happened here in the province of Alberta. That unfortunate thing is that we have a Chief Electoral Officer that doesn't believe it is his job to promote democracy. Clearly, there is a breakdown in thinking in this, clearly a breakdown in communication between the powers that be and a person who is entrusted in this body. What this amendment does is that it corrects that. What it does is that it allows us to make amends for a mistake that has happened. It allows us to now change the parameters of this job description, to have this individual who can go out now with our support in this Legislature and promote democracy to encourage people, first-time voters to go out and take part, to do those things.

I think it'd be a great thing if we could somehow in the next election go from a 41 per cent participation rate to a 51 per cent participation rate. That would be a great thing, and if the Chief Electoral Officer could be part of that, I for one would be very proud of the work we did here today in passing this amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak. I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this well-thought-out and well-reasoned amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. My colleague for Calgary-Buffalo is being too modest in that he had an almost identical amendment that contained the first part of this, the section that appears as section (a) of amendment A3. That is the part that would now be requiring the Chief Electoral Officer to engage in education and providing information to the public about the election process and the democratic right to vote, section 4(2). In order to make sure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was able to put forward this whole amendment, including the second part, he nicely gave way. So thank you to the member for doing that. I am in support of this amendment, clearly, as my colleague was going to do half of it anyway, although I think the second half is equally of merit.

I guess my question is: if the Chief Electoral Officer as an

impartial body is not the one that is charged with educating the public, who is? Do we really want government charged with that? I mean, government in this province is highly partisan. Do we really want to hand that over to government and the Public Affairs Bureau to be educating people on the electoral process and the democratic right to vote? I don't think so. Maybe government members do because it would be more likely to kind of go their way and put them in a good light, but I don't think the rest of the citizens in the province and, certainly, I don't as a member of the Official Opposition want to see that be the group that's charged with doing this.

If it's not going to be the government and it's not going to be the Chief Electoral Officer, well, who else? Well, there are some very good not-for-profit organizations that are out there operating on this, like Democracy Watch and Fair Vote. Frankly, I think that at the point that we're going to charge them with this particular duty, it's incumbent on the government to start funding them, and I can't see the government taking that step with any kind of a happy smile on their face. Once again, if it's not the Chief Electoral Officer, who is it? I'm not getting any kind of an answer on that.

I think it's pretty clear that this is the appropriate place to lay the responsibility to take care of that education, and I think that there are a lot of different kinds of opportunities that could be taken up under this particular section. One of the things that I had spoken about with one of the previous Chief Electoral Officers was, you know, a series of posters that could be sent out to apartment buildings, basically multifamily units where they're locked off and there's a security access, a series of posters sent around at the beginning or just prior to the election campaign that essentially said: "We're going into an election campaign. Please be aware that people will be coming into your building campaigning on behalf of candidates. This is part of the democratic process. Please understand that under the Election Act they're allowed to come into your building." You know, some kind of information that's being passed on.

Certainly, in my constituency and I think for anybody that's dealing with gated communities or multifamily units with security access, getting access to the building can be a real hassle, and the poster idea sounded like a really good one to me. That's exactly the kind of thing that is an option for the Chief Electoral Officer to be fulfilling this section if we do pass this amendment and make it into a requirement of the job rather than an option for the job, which is, indeed, what's happening here.

The second part of this, subsection (5), is essentially along the same lines in that, you know, once the election has happened, the Chief Electoral Officer would provide "a breakdown of results, a summary of costs," and it's inserting here, "and recommendations to improve future elections." All of that would be included in the report that goes to the standing committee, and that standing committee lays the report before the Legislative Assembly.

3:20

Now, one of the interesting things that happens here – and a number of you may not be aware of this. In the first number of recommendations that were made by the previous Chief Electoral Officer, that individual did exactly that: gave them through to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, who then went in camera. God bless them; they really like to do this. Then there was a recommendation that that information not be released. So nobody else was aware of the recommendations that had been made. They just sort of became secret. I don't think that was actually the intention of the committee members, but in going in camera and discussing some of these things, one thing led to another, and they were excluded. They got pulled underneath that sort of cone of silence, and nobody even knew that recommendations had been made.

For the longest time, years and years later, I'm getting calls from the media and from others saying: do you have a copy of the recommendations that the Chief Electoral Officer made? I'm, you know, pawing through the binders and binders of stuff that I keep because I never throw anything out from any of these committees – I'll be a fire hazard before I'm done here – and then realizing that it was part of this material that, in fact, I couldn't release. I'd have to say: yes, I have it; yes, I've looked at it, but I can't release it.

Well, we're trying to have a public discussion on this stuff. So the importance of it being set up that the Chief Electoral Officer will – the word we're using here is “shall” – make recommendations for that and in this case that it would be included in the report that goes through the standing committee and gets tabled in the House. That way we wouldn't end up losing any bits of it, like we lost before. Frankly, that set us back a while because we had the initial set of recommendations, and then it wasn't until there was a whole second set of recommendations that the first set was able to become public. So we went for a period of time with nobody knowing that these recommendations had in fact been made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Those were the comments that I wanted to make in support of the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I really do urge everyone to accept this. It's a fairly mundane but I think very important amendment to the act, nothing for the government to be afraid of. It's all good, happy things, so I hope that you will support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A3?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on Bill 7.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, that was unfortunate but hardly surprising. There are so many things in this bill that were previously recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, who was so unceremoniously asked to leave his role previously, that were really very, very good recommendations which have been ignored by this government. The most obvious one, of course, is the failure of the government to adopt the recommendation with respect to leadership campaigns and ensuring that donations made in the course of leadership campaigns are made public to ensure transparency to the public. Of course, that one was not followed through on, coincidentally, at a time when I figure we've probably got a 50-50 chance that the government may itself be going through a leadership campaign between now and the next election, so it's very convenient.

Nonetheless, the other thing that they did not follow up on is the notion of fixed election dates, and another thing that they didn't follow up on was the notion of assisting with anywhere voting and advance voting, particularly given the unique nature of Alberta's workforce in many cases, where we often have so many people working away from home, in camps, and who are for all intents and purposes prevented from voting. There were so many things this government could have done to increase and enhance democracy through this bill that they chose not to do.

One of the things that they are putting forward in this act which is a problem relates to how those potential voters who do not have the privilege of having a home and an address would still be able to cast

their ballot. This government makes much ado about their so-called commitment to the homeless, yet we are moving forward on a piece of legislation that will limit and certainly obstruct those people's ability to participate in the electoral system.

On that basis I have another amendment that I'd like to put forward. I will distribute that amendment and then speak to it once it's been distributed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll pause for a moment while the next amendment is being distributed.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, this is amendment A4. Please go ahead.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment again appears to be on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It moves that Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 31 in the proposed section 95 by striking out subsection (4). Subsection (4) states: “No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election.”

What the bill currently says is that where there is a potential voter who wants to cast their ballot but that voter does not have an address and identification, another person who does have an address and identification can vouch for this person, vouch for who they are and also vouch for the fact that they reside in the constituency in question. That's a good thing. The problem is that section 95(4) would limit that so that the person who is vouching can only vouch for one person. Basically, what would happen is that you would vouch for homeless person A, and then you would be unable to vouch for anyone else.

Now, the problem with that, of course – and it's something that, certainly, we see in my riding and, unfortunately, is a growing problem throughout our province; it has become quite an unprecedented problem, actually – is that when you have someone who is without an address and without ID who wants to vote, they should obviously be able to, but often the people who are most able to vouch for those people are people who work in shelters. As much as we would love for there to be one shelter worker for every homeless person, it's just simply not the case that there is. Frankly, that's probably not the best-case scenario anyway. What it means, then, is that very few people who are homeless will be given the opportunity to vote. This is really a significant problem.

I had the experience in the mid-90s of being very involved in a campaign in a riding that was at the time referred to as Vancouver-Mount Pleasant in downtown Vancouver, which took in large portions of the downtown east side. There were a number of people there that did not have ID and did not have addresses, but those people actually still had a community, and those people still cast their ballots. It was really quite amazing, the number of them who lined up to cast their ballots.

What happened in those situations was that the people working with them in the shelters, volunteers, could vouch for them. But had they been limited to a situation where one person could only vouch for one other person, many, many of those people living in the downtown east side would have had their right to vote taken from them, stolen from them by the election laws that we are putting into place.

3:30

Now, as much as this government claims to be trying to do everything they can to end homelessness, the fact of the matter is that the number of homeless in Alberta has only gone up over the last decade. As much as they may claim to be trying to do something about it, you know, I'm going to withhold my judgment at this

point and suggest that we at least operate on the assumption that the trend that we've seen over the last few years is likely to continue, at least in the short term. If that's the case, we're on the verge, then, of passing a piece of legislation that is going to take away the right to vote from a growing section of our population.

We all remember the pictures just a few years ago of people with their families, you know, living in tents in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray and all over this province, where people were moving to Alberta yet did not have the ability to find a place to live. Those people would have struggled to be able to cast their vote had they been eligible to vote.

This piece of legislation will ensure that this problem continues. I think that there are many other ways that the concerns around people vouching for other people could be addressed in terms of the administration of that right and the administration of that process without at the same time taking away the right to vote from Albertans who at this time in their lives are both without home and without identification.

It's with that in mind that I put forward this amendment and ask that my colleagues in the Legislature support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak on amendment A4, put on the floor by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Oh, boy, this is a really important amendment for, I would say, any constituency that's included in the core of cities, especially anything that's dealing with sort of traditionally disenfranchised voters. People who may be in emergency overnight shelters, transitional housing, may not have what's considered kind of traditional government identification like a driver's licence, a worker ID, that kind of thing.

We have a sort of series of cascading events that happen here. You've got somebody that's homeless or recovering from drug or alcohol rehab. They've been away from home long enough that their ID isn't valid anymore, so in effect they don't really have ID. They want to vote, and in other places we're allowing that if they don't have the two pieces of ID that satisfy, a person whose name is on the voters list may vouch for the individual. The term "elector" is very important here because it's signalling someone whose name is on the voters list. Now, that's a whole other cascading problem.

I'm going to back up one cascade here to just talk about the difficulty that it kind of dumps the load here of one elector vouching for one elector. It dumps that load onto our NGO organizations, that tend to be dealing most commonly with people who may be trying to vote without ID. Okay. So who's that? That's pretty obvious stuff. It does tend to be shelter workers, people that are around those shelters, rehabs, transitional housing, that would know someone and could say: "Yes. I know they were here last night. I can vouch for them." You see, it's even saying that a person who does not have an ordinary residence is deemed to reside at the shelter, hostel, or similar facility that most frequently provides services to the person, but you still have to have somebody that can vouch that that's where they were last night. Right? We're looking for the residency in Alberta bit.

Now, by saying that the elector can only vouch for one person, you basically would have to have – oh, I don't know – a couple of hundred volunteers at the emergency shelters if they can only vouch for one person. I think people haven't thought far enough ahead about what's being contemplated here. We need to be able to have a shelter worker that can say, "Yes, I can verify that" and then go

through pretty much everybody that they know and can verify were at the shelter last night. But to say, "No, no, no, that person can only verify for one person," where are we supposed to come up with the rest of the electors who can verify for the rest of the people in the shelter? I hope that wasn't too convoluted, but that's what's being set up in this section. When you read the actual act, "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." That's where the problem is created, and that's what's trying to be addressed by, essentially, striking out that section.

Now, there's a second problem that is created here, and that is that the term "elector" has specific legal standing. An elector is someone whose name appears on the election list. You have to be on the election list already. Well, given the difficulties that we're having in trying to get a permanent voters list – the number of people that got knocked off the voters list in the last election, and nobody can explain why; the issues around enumerating – our fail rate on getting people properly onto the electors list last time was really high, and the percentage of changes was also accordingly high.

I'm just looking for those recommendations because they did give us an indication from the big electoral book of how many changes had to be made to the electors list, how many changes were made between the closing of the possible changes time period, and then how many changes were made following. I mean, it was like 7,000 people. In my constituency there were 7,000 people that were put on the voters list once the election campaign had actually begun, so the official revised voters list – over 7,000 people in my constituency, which is just a staggering number of people. That's the additional complication that's caused by this.

If we do not support this amendment, we're now in a situation of trying to find the people that are actually on the list and may not even know, for example, that they didn't make it on the list or that they got dumped out. Trying to find the person who is an elector, is already on the voters list, is able to verify the individual without the identification really does disenfranchise a very specific group of people, an identifiable group of people because they tend to be – I'm trying to be descriptive here without being discriminatory. I would argue that you're likely to find that that group of disenfranchised people is more likely to be residing in the centre of the cities, where you have the services that they would be seeking; for example, things like overnight shelters, transitional housing, rehab, even the day shelter programs that are available.

That's the problem that has been created in this act that I think needs to be addressed and has been picked up by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I really think that we should be supporting this because if we don't, we've created not one but two problems here. I hope that we can get some support from the government side to make sure that this particular amendment passes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the debate on this amendment, and I must say that I have some empathy with some of the arguments that have been put forward. If I can get some clarity from the hon. mover of the amendment as to the number of times she believes we would need to have more than one elector doing the verification for someone who would fall into the categories perhaps that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has discussed or perhaps family or some of those other situations that do arise on occasion during the election process. I was curious as to whether or not she could expand on some of that for me just to answer that kind of a question.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate the question from the member. It is difficult, of course, to do an overall estimate. I think that the most recent count of Edmontonians who do not currently have an address, for instance, is roughly 3,000. I stand to be corrected, but that's what sits in my mind. Now, of course, not all of those people are without ID, obviously. Many of those people, although they might not have an address, might actually have ID, but many would not have ID. Of course, even where you have ID, you may or may not have an address on your ID, so that becomes a problem – it depends on the nature of the ID – because you need to not only swear that you are who you are; you need to swear you are a resident of that particular area.

I would suggest that probably between the riding of Edmonton-Centre, the riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona – am I missing any other ones? – maybe also Edmonton-Gold Bar as it currently exists, the vast majority would probably reside in those central ridings. That's more or less the number that I'm speaking about. That's the number that we're looking at.

Certainly, the experience that I had when I was in Vancouver is that the shelter workers might well over the course of a day vouch for up to 25 people, for instance. I think that would be a reasonable number that they would end up dealing with, and then you'd have more than one shelter worker and more than one shelter, but it could easily be up to that many. Also, of course, the shelter itself can't empty all its staff and have them run down to the polling station so that they can all be there. Typically what would happen is that they would assign one or two staff to be at the polling station to then verify if people who are typically residents at their shelter came through. That's how it worked when we went through this process on the downtown east side in Vancouver in the mid-90s, when I was helping to organize their election day process.

I think that's an estimate and a guesstimate for the member. I'm sorry that I can't be more specific, but I do know that if we limit it to one, the problem that we will definitely end up with is that a lot of people will come to vote, and they won't be allowed to vote.

The other thing. I'm not sure if the Member for Edmonton-Centre noted this or not, but I realize – it's perhaps a problem with our amendment – that by making it be an elector that swears for another elector, you could easily have someone who works at a shelter who is themselves not an elector in that electoral district.

Ms Blakeman: It doesn't narrow it.

Ms Notley: It doesn't narrow it. So you just need to be someone that can vote. Okay. That's good. That's not a problem.

But you're still probably looking at having to vouch for, I think, in some cases maybe up to 25, maybe only four or five but definitely more than one. We have the Youth Emergency Shelter in my riding. They can have people residing there who are eligible to vote, for instance. There is just a community that typically resides in my riding that does not have an address.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, it is a privilege to speak in favour of this amendment moved by the hon. member from the third party on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-

Norwood. In particular, we see this bill trying to ameliorate some of the difficulties in the voting process that numerous Albertans have throughout this province, not only in, I'd say, downtown centres, more disproportionately there, but also throughout the province. There are many people who lose their ID, do not have the appropriate papers, are not on the voters list who do from time to time come forward and need to have someone vouch that they are living in that constituency. I think what this amendment does is a very good thing. It allows for an individual to vouch for a certain group of individuals or a number of individuals who may need some verification as to the fact that they are living in a constituency, that they are working in the constituency, that they have been hanging their hat in that constituency for a little while or at least the night before the election. That's what this is meant to ameliorate.

If we want to get more specific, we can. Primarily, we have a homeless problem here in Alberta that tends to gravitate into the city centres, where individuals who are often excluded from the mainstream processes are staying. Currently there are homeless shelters located in downtown Calgary, downtown Edmonton. I know that in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo there are two shelters. One is the Drop-in Centre; one would be the Mustard Seed. Individuals there happen to be homeless, and sadly they often or sometimes do not carry the requisite amount of paperwork to be able to vote.

Clearly, this bill is meant to allow for an individual who works with these individuals or spends time with these individuals to be able to go down and vouch for them at the voting station, where they can then go forward and say: hey, this gentleman resides at the Drop-in Centre or Mustard Seed or wherever, has been residing here for the last week, the last three days, the last night, and I'm vouching for him that he did this and that he should be able to take part in the election. That seems to be part of what we're trying to do here in Alberta, part of trying to extend the franchise to people who want to vote, who want to take part on voting day, who want to cast their ballot for either an individual or a political party. This should be encouraged and not stifled.

As the legislation is currently written – and the Member for Edmonton-Centre did an excellent job of going through the trouble with the bill, that first you had to find someone to vouch for you and, second of all, that that person then had to be on the voters list. Okay? Then also we looked at the last election, at some of the difficulties with being on the voters list. Voters lists were incomplete. They were shockingly absent of many of the people who lived in my constituency. We all know that downtown Calgary does have a transient or moving around population. Nevertheless, it was shocking how few people actually were on that list.

What we're asking people who don't have IDs to do is, first, find an individual who happens to be on the voters list. That could be an onerous task in the first place. What we're looking for is something that makes it a little easier for that person to go down and exercise his democratic right. It also encourages members of our population who are looking, hopefully, for some means to improve their lives. Maybe on that day in question, when the election is held, they'll say: jeppers creepers, this is going to be the start of me trying to pull myself up by my bootstraps. They're going to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, go down and cast a ballot for their political party, and the rest of their lives they're going to go by this, trying to re-enter their way into society.

3:50

This could be one of those moments in time that gives them what I think they refer to as a moment of clarity: "I know when I turned my life around. It was when I went down and voted at the 2012 election, when I found that person to vouch for me." This could be

that moment of clarity that we'd be providing that individual with in this bill by making this amendment, by saying, "You, too, are going to be a part of the voting process" and making it easier for them. I'll tell you what. If we don't make this amendment, that person can go down there, try and find a way to vote, get frustrated and say: "Well, this society really doesn't want me anyway. Maybe it's right. Maybe it is too hard to take part in things. Maybe I'm better off just sort of not bothering to improve my life. Taking part in this kind of stuff is useless anyway."

I know I'm stretching it a bit, Mr. Chair. However, that's what we're kind of doing here. I really see this as being an opportunity to extend the franchise to some people who maybe need it, maybe want it, and it could lead to us not only promoting democracy but promoting people taking charge of their own lives. The changes put forward by the hon. member are very good, ones that I wish I had thought of myself and that I think would be very good for people in my area in certain situations, primarily the homeless or people without identification.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology on amendment A4.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just trying to get a little more clarity around the intent of the amendment. When I look at the act and I look at some of the discussions that we've had as it related to why that would be in there, it's really a protection of, frankly, somebody coming with a group of people that might not be – and I'm pretty sure that the hon. member knows where I'm going. Also, we have had some discussions. This kind of mirrors what the federal legislation is. I guess I'd be curious as to the member's opinion. If we remove this, the protection for the Chief Electoral Officer against someone who would come in with a whole group of people, you know, where you'd have one person vouching for a busload, is that a fear of the member? By saying yes to your amendment, it's a possibility. I'm curious whether you have another option that we might look at.

Ms Notley: Well, two points to make. First, in response to the question of the hon. minister, I think that the first thing is of course to remove this piece right now because the one-to-one is the problem. But let's just say hypothetically – and I'm making this up as I go along, you know; this is my first attempt at governance – that through regulation one could potentially have a process where the CEO had an application process for vouchers. For instance, for people who perceive themselves as potentially people that would be in the position to vouch, there would be an application process that they might go through. That might be a voucher registrar or something like that. I'm just throwing this out there. Now, I'm sure I could find ways to critique that, too. Nonetheless, in theory, that might be a way to do it, so your vouchers have to apply to be vouchers. Just one possibility. I'm not sure how much more red tape that would create.

I understand the problem with a busload of a hundred people showing up that no one can distinguish – that's fair – but at the same time the answer that is in this legislation creates another problem.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre corrected me that we're probably looking more at a homeless population, for instance, in Alberta that could be as high as 18,000. If you have roughly 6,000 in Edmonton, 6,000 in Calgary, and 6,000 everywhere else, you're looking at potentially disenfranchising up to 18,000 Albertans.

I think there are ways in which this could be worked out. I'm not

suggesting that the way I proposed is the answer. What you could do is eliminate this particular provision and then give yourself the regulatory discretion – and I know you all love regulatory discretion – to find a way to address the problem in a way that doesn't, you know, kill a spider with a sledgehammer.

That's my answer to the question.

Ms Blakeman: You know, I think what we're trying to do here is strike a reasonable balance in protecting the reliability of the electors list. We're trying to make it possible for people who are disenfranchised to have a reasonable access point, to have someone vouch for them, to be allowed to vote, and at the same time protect us from the busload of people that are driven up or the group that walks over from the nursing home – I can think of ones in my riding – and people try and vouch in 200 people.

Really, I think the way to do this is – if we leave it in the legislation, it's not possible. There is a prohibition. You cannot. It says, "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." The prohibition is in. If you take it out, you can still go and work with the shelters, go and work with, you know, the Chinese seniors' lodge, go and work with some of those groups that are going to be trying to vouch for people and say: how do we do this in a reasonable way? I'm about to choke – and anybody watching my face will know it – but you're going to end up having to put it into regulations so that you have some kind of a limit. [interjections] See? Unfortunately, that was all on the record, and my grandmother can read that and think: oh, dear, Laurie.

You know, we're trying to strike a balance here and protect the integrity of what we're doing and the integrity of the system and at the same time trying to make it possible for people who are seeking out a route to be enfranchised to get access to that. If you leave the prohibition in there, there is no opportunity to do it, so I think that out it must come.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. members for, really, I think satisfying some concerns that I had with this amendment. Given the discussions that we've had as to why we put that clause into the bill and given the fact that the opposition is very keen to help us work out the solution if our fears become a problem, I think we are certainly capable of creating some regulation around this. I'm glad that they support our making a regulation around this. It's fabulous.

I for one, Mr. Chairman, would probably support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of words here. First off, I want to say that I actually agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre on something. It is a good day today. She has mentioned to me that it is about creating balance. This is about creating balance between the integrity of the voters lists and people not being disenfranchised.

Mr. Chair, prior to getting to this House, I handled a lot of elections litigation. I have to say that I've seen a lot of problems when you give too much subjective power to the particular Chief Electoral Officer. I'm quite concerned as to what happens when you get a busload of individuals coming in here with one person to vouch for them all, the pandemonium that that can create throughout the entire elections process, throughout the entire voting day. It may be very difficult to actually police, for lack of a better term, what specifically is going on. It may create a backlog for the other people that may be disenfranchised. Everybody has busy schedules in this province. They may not have the time to wait around.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had talked about accessibility issues with the homeless population. I thank her for that, and I share her concern. At the same time, it's again about balance. My department this year is actually going to be experimenting with issuing identification to homeless people, partially to address this issue in and of itself. I would submit to you that that's a better way to actually go and address the issue of disenfranchisement than changing the act in and of itself.

4:00

I'd say that if anything else this amendment should actually seek to raise the amount of people that one person can vouch for, to maybe five or even 10, but not get rid of it entirely. I think this leaves too much potential for an abuse of process in our election in and of itself. This will leave it open to abuse.

The Minister of Education and House leader had mentioned to me earlier that this largely resembles federal legislation, which, to my experience, works relatively fine, and I think that by deviating from this process, we're setting a really dangerous precedent here.

In conclusion, this tips the balance too far away from the integrity of the voters list. I will not be supporting this amendment, and I encourage all members to follow suit.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on amendment A4.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It gives me great pleasure to actually stand up and speak to this because I feel very strongly. I have many, many years of experience running elections at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. We in the old days, when we actually used to have enumerators that would go out on the streets, took a great deal of pride that our lists were absolutely accurate. Then when we sat at the tables as deputy returning officers, you can rest assured that this, particularly in southern Alberta, was run as honestly as it possibly could be. From that experience I have a couple of comments.

Earlier in the day I spoke about the Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge. Now, this would be a perfect example of women knowing other women because they've helped them get their ID. Once they have their ID, they're not too badly off, but if that election is called previous to them getting their ID, there is at least somebody in that organization that could vouch for them. So I think it's very important that these women would be recognized. I think that you can't have all of these people come to the polling stations each with their little friend in hand. There has to be a better way to do it.

One of the ways that I think could be done is that – I don't think this is creative thinking; I think this is what we do already. In fact, I know it's what we do. We just have to recognize that people in homeless shelters or people without ID are actually people that need to be treated with respect. Once we start getting that attitudinal change that these are people that must be recognized, then I think it's an easy thing to do.

One of the ways that it could be done, where one person might be able to vouch for many, is if an enumerator was assigned to homeless shelters, and that enumerator would go and enumerate these people. They would be the ones that were in charge of the list, and in fact the ballot boxes could be taken to homeless shelters so that we don't have to have these people perhaps taking a bus or not having the polling stations close to them.

We do this in nursing homes; we do it for many, many of our other vulnerable people; we take ballots to people's homes if they're

incapacitated because we want to make sure that they can vote. We want to make sure that they're a part of the voting public. I believe that if homeless people had the ballot boxes taken to the shelters with an enumerator that had enumerated and knew who they were, there may be some people that would fall through the cracks that maybe hadn't been enumerated or perhaps there wasn't somebody to vouch for them, but I would suspect that we would get the majority of the people. Now, the enumeration can't be done weeks in advance. It would have to be done maybe a couple of days ahead of time because people are so transient.

When people, particularly those that are down on their luck and either pulling themselves up or they're sliding down further before they hit bottom before they can come back up again – the fact that they would be respected enough to have a ballot box brought to them and actually be allowed to vote I know would be a real push, I guess, for their self-esteem and that, really, they are a part of a much larger society. They're not just marginalized people that people sometimes pity. Instead of working with them as people and working with their great potential, often people do act in a pitying sort of way. Unfortunately, I've seen that kind of behaviour, particularly at suppers like the Christmas dinners or the Easter dinners, where the homeless are allowed to come. It's an attitudinal change that has to be explained, I guess, to some people.

I think there has to be another attitudinal change that would make sure that there was a way. There are many ways that it can be done. All it needs is the will. If there's a will, there's a way. I think the attitudinal change has to be on the part of the Chief Electoral Officer. I think his job is to make voting as easy and as available to every single person in Alberta so that they are allowed to vote. If he had an attitudinal change, I think that maybe this kind of one person being able to vouch for many people could happen. There are any number of ways that this can happen. It's simply a matter of will.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Following the lead of the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, I, too, would suggest that I think the discussion has been useful. Section 95(4), "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." There could be abuse of the process if you took that out in terms of having one person vouch for a whole lot of people. But I think if you go up to subsection (2), it basically says that the person who is vouching has to be on the list in that polling station. So there are checks and balances in place. I agree with Edmonton-Centre that if there is a problem that needs to be resolved because that is not there, then we should try and do it through the Chief Electoral Officer and through regulations.

I would encourage people to support this amendment so that we can deal with this particular piece and move on to the next step.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A4.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:08 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hayden	McQueen
Anderson	Hehr	Notley
Blackett	Hinman	Olson
Blakeman	Horner	Ouellette
Campbell	Jacobs	Pastoor
Dallas	Knight	Quest
Danyluk	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Evans	Liepert	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Xiao
Griffiths	Lund	Zwozdesky
Hancock	MacDonald	

4:20

Against the motion:

Berger	Elniski	Prins
Denis	Marz	
Totals:	For – 32	Against – 5

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Deputy Chair: On Bill 7 as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: That was very fun. I don't think that has ever happened before, so maybe I'll start a run and go with my third amendment although we'll see how this one goes.

With respect to the Election Act, as I've mentioned several times before, one of the concerns we have is the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer was making recommendations that we do everything possible to expand the opportunity for people to vote. Not all those recommendations found their way into the act. In deference to that fact and the fact that we would like to see ways in which people's opportunities to vote could be expanded, I have the following amendment to propose. I will distribute it and then speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause for a moment while that amendment is distributed. Hon. members, this is amendment A5.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said, the concern that we had was the fact that we were looking for ways to expand access to voting and to ensure that more people had an opportunity to vote on more occasions. The motion that I'm putting forward on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood reads as follows: that Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended by striking out section 42 and substituting the following. Section 116(1) is struck out, and the following is substituted:

116(1) An elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or at the poll on polling day may apply to vote by Special Ballot.

Currently in Bill 7 there is a proposal in section 42 to adjust slightly the definitions and the criteria that are currently listed in section 116(1). What we are proposing to do is to eliminate all of the criteria that are set out in section 116(1) and simply allow that an elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or at the polling day may apply to vote by special ballot. The point of this, of course, is to simply expand the use of the special ballot so that more people have an opportunity to vote.

Now, as has been mentioned, the former Chief Electoral Officer had talked about a number of ways in which we could expand the opportunity for Albertans to cast their ballot, bearing in mind that we

have concerns with respect to students and also voters who may be residing in locations away from their home on election day. The Chief Electoral Officer, for instance, essentially recommended that there be anywhere advance voting. He recommended permitting "electors to vote in any electoral division within the province during the days of advance voting and by Special Ballot, at any returning office, throughout the election period." The CEO also recommended permitting "the establishment of additional advance voting stations in high traffic areas and places where large numbers of electors are located [like] malls, airports, work camps, and college campuses."

Electors were originally restricted to voting at assigned polling stations in order to facilitate control over the list of electors and ensure the security of elections, but now that the list of electors is an electronic document, it is actually possible to take new measures to facilitate voting for people who are living far away from their place of ordinary residence. These measures would have made it easier for students, oil field workers, and other mobile tradespeople to vote as they could simply go to any returning office during advance polling, as opposed to what the situation is right now.

Now, in first reading the Attorney General said that they wouldn't be implementing this recommendation because of logistic issues, although they will be implementing the recommendation to allow people to vote in an advance poll for any reason. However, we see this as a fairly major missed opportunity. What this amendment does is get at that issue because what it does is essentially say that one needn't be, as is currently the case, physically incapacitated, absent from the electoral division on the specific election day, an inmate, someone employed by the CEO during the election, or someone that's subject to other circumstances that may or may not be applied by the Chief Electoral Officer. Instead, it simply says that if you can't be there on election day, you can get a special ballot. The end. Then your ballot will, of course, be counted later and all that other kind of stuff, but you can get a special ballot.

The rules around applying for a special ballot in terms of the opportunities for oversight and checking to ensure that that person is who they say they are and live where they say they live and all those other kinds of things would still be in place. You'd still have all those checks and balances. You would just open the door for more people to vote in more locations at more times for longer periods during the day. This, of course, is designed to do what I've kind of been harping on about all afternoon, which is increase the opportunity for people to vote and hopefully increase the voter turnout of Albertans.

That is what this recommendation is designed to do. It is, effectively, an attempt to get at those many recommendations that were put forward by the former Chief Electoral Officer which did not find their way into this piece of legislation. So I would ask my colleagues in the Assembly to reconsider the decision to not put those many other recommendations into this piece of legislation and to get at the same outcome, enhancing the opportunity for people to vote while maintaining the safeguards in place, and support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's, again, a privilege to speak to this amendment and in fact speak in favour of this amendment. It looks like a good amendment because it follows one of the recommendations made by the former Chief Electoral Officer. It enables more electors who want to take part in democracy to be able to cast a ballot, and it seems to me like all of the safeguards are in

place. Basically, it's ensuring that an elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or on polling day may apply to vote by special ballot. It just removes the criteria that you be incapacitated or have a disability. I think it just opens up the franchise to more people and more places, and really it can be used and handled with a well-planned, well-thought-out election that will allow more people to take part.

4:30

Again, I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing it forward. It's a good amendment. It will extend the franchise. I think we're more than able to handle this type of amendment here in the 21st century.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I urge all of my other colleagues in the House to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak on amendment A5? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, regarding this amendment A5 if I could have a couple of questions answered before I decide whether I'm going to support it or not, I would really appreciate it. First to the hon. member, Mr. Chairman: how does the process work now? We were having a discussion in this area of the House, off the record of course, around what exactly is in place now regarding individuals who are unable to vote at the advance poll or on polling day, whether they're working in an area of Alberta far from their residence and they're out of town, whether they're sick, whether they're incapacitated in some way and shut in at their house and require a special ballot, whether or not they would be holidaying, for instance, in Florida or Arizona, in the case of an Alberta person who is retired and, fortunately, has a retirement income high enough to take a break during the extreme portion of the winter. This is very important because the last number of elections, as you well know, have been held in March.

If I could have a further explanation as to how this process around special ballots works now. Is an individual representing a campaign allowed to have more than one special ballot per trip? How does this work? I'm confused. I know what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo told me regarding the special ballots and how they worked or did not work in Calgary-Buffalo. I was under the assumption that a representative from an individual campaign could only deal with one special ballot at a time.

If I could have clarification from the hon. member regarding those questions, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. I will endeavour to provide as much clarification as I can. I may or may not be able to answer all of the questions. I'm not sure if one agent from one campaign is limited to one special ballot. I think, basically, the idea is that the special ballot is owned by the person who fills it out and signs it. So although a campaign may be able to transport the ballot from point A to point B, it needs to be filled out and signed, and there need to be copies of ID and all that kind of stuff provided by the person who's actually receiving the special ballot.

What happens right now is that you can use the special ballot if, for instance, you're not going to be in the jurisdiction on the advance polling days or on election day. You can go in and get a special ballot yourself, individually, and fill it out. If you are physically incapacitated either before or on election day, you can call up your local deputy returning officer and ask them to deliver a special ballot

to your house, and then you would fill it out. All the appropriate things would be done, and then that ballot would be cast.

There's no question; certainly, I've been on campaigns where on election day itself we've been in the process where we've phoned people who've indicated in the past a desire to support our candidate. They have indicated: well, I can't come because I'm too sick or I broke my hip or yada, yada, yada. Then at that point the campaign might transport the ballot. I believe that the safeguards are still in place so that it's still ultimately the relationship between the voter who is filling out the special ballot and the returning officer. They still have to sign a declaration and provide ID and all that kind of stuff. That's the way it works right now.

Under the current section 116 these are the criteria where you become entitled to use a special ballot: if you are physically incapacitated; if you are absent from the electoral division; if you are, basically, an employee on election day of the deputy returning officer or the Chief Electoral Officer and otherwise engaged in the election; if you are an inmate; if you are a resident of a remote area designated under section 31 – and I'm assuming it's someplace where they can't get a poll to – or any other circumstance prescribed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

The point of this would be simply that if I am planning to vote and I know I'm going to be in town on election day, so I don't qualify that way, but if I also know that I'm working a 12-hour shift and that as much as I have a legal right to leave my place of employment – let's say I'm a nurse – to go cast my ballot but also know that we've been short-staffed for several years and that my supervisor is going to really not be happy with me if I exercise my right under the act to go and vote that day, and if I'm also working on the advance poll days and times, I might just walk into the returning office three days after the writ is dropped because I'm not working that week and fill out a special ballot and cast my ballot there.

That's the kind of extra ease because right now what happens is that you only have the limited days when advanced voting is allowed. Those hours are not all day long. There are specific hours during the day. Then you have the election day itself. The point of this would basically be to allow people to vote at any time during the election period regardless of whether or not they are physically incapacitated and regardless of whether they are or are not there on election day. It's, again, geared towards increasing participation and increasing the opportunity for people to participate.

I hope that answers some of your questions.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A5?

Hearing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 7 as amended. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, this is an ideal time to bring it up. I have a question for the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and perhaps through the course of debate he could refresh my memory. Is it not the hon. member's bill from last year, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009? This is repealed in this act. I'm curious as to why the House spent considerable time on this last year, and now we find that this legislation has been repealed so quickly. If any hon. member could enlighten me through the course of debate on why this has occurred, I certainly would welcome that.

4:40

Also, Mr. Chairman, I have questions in committee on the coming into force of this proposed Bill 7. Certain sections, of course, are coming into force at certain times, and I would appreciate an explanation as to why this is occurring. Sections 77, 78, 79, and 85(a) and (b) come into force on January 1, 2011. Then how exactly is this going to work? Sections 31, 34, 35, 39, 41, 43, and 49 apply with respect to the next election that is held at least six months after the coming into force of this section and subsequent elections. If I'm interpreting this correctly, parts of this bill, if it was to be voted into law, would not apply if the next election was held six months after the coming into force of this bill.

I'm sort of looking at a bit of history here, Mr. Chairman. Going back to 1989, of course, it was only three years into the term of one of the previous Progressive Conservative regimes, and a snap election was held. I'm not saying this is going to happen, but I'm getting very, very suspicious. I can confidently say that we will be going to the polls provincially before the sustainability fund is drained. Now, how quickly the sustainability fund is drained is a billion dollar question, but I'm certainly going to be prepared myself. Yes. That would be 98(2).

Now, 98(3), sections 21, 54, 76, 83, 84, 86(b), 87, 88, and 94(b) come into force on the day that a writ is issued under section 40 of the Election Act for the next general election after this section comes into force.

Any number of things could happen here. This bill could be debated and passed, and the proclamation date could be – I don't know. There could be a lot of work put into this bill. There could be a lot of changes made to the Election Act, but the changes would not necessarily be reflected in how we govern ourselves in the next provincial election. So I'm curious why we have this coming into force that appears to be in three stages, Mr. Chairman. If the government members or the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General could provide an answer to that, I would be very grateful.

Before I move on, Mr. Chairman, certainly when you look at the back of the bill and you continue on, there's also 98(4), where sections 45, 56(f), 57(a), 58(a) and (b), 62, 63, 89, 90, and 97 come into force on proclamation. I was wrong. There are four stages to this bill, if it was to become law, before it becomes the rules from which we would conduct elections under.

I think those are very important questions, and I think they merit an explanation from the hon. Minister of Justice before we proceed.

Certainly, whenever I read *Hansard*, there has been a lot said in this Assembly about electronic voting. There has been a lot said in our caucus about electronic voting. I think the benchmark would be the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview regarding electronic voting. I think the hon. member summed it up very well.

Now, in the last number of years I've read a number of interesting articles, and this is long after we all witnessed the presidential election in Florida, the election that sent George W. Bush to the White House as President over Mr. Al Gore. [some applause] Wow, I wonder if the former President of the United States, George W. Bush, has things to do, or would he be watching this live on the Internet stream? I don't think he's had a clap like that in quite a while. That is sort of a reflection of that caucus, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to, you know, be off topic here. I'm not going to be drawn off topic. Certainly not.

Now, when we look at the conduct of that election and the hanging chad, the different districts where there were issues over voting, of course, the final result had to be set through judicial review, as was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' election in 2004. That went to various levels of the judiciary before

it was finally resolved. When you have a voting system, it has to be accurate. In case there is a dispute, it has to be transparent. The proof of who voted, where they voted: that has to be available if there is to be a mechanism to resolve any differences. Certainly, the number of ballots granted to or taken by electors has to balance with either the number of ballots that are in the box or the number of destroyed ballots or rejected ballots, however you want to look at that.

We have a system in place now. We have a system, as the hon. member points out, where everyone can take a few minutes out of their day, whether it's before they go to work or after they come home from work, to vote. I'm not saying that perhaps we shouldn't change the voting hours to make it more convenient; we can certainly look at that. I find it quite odd that there are people in this country – and I'm talking about the Canadian military, the men and women in the Canadian military – who are willing to sacrifice their lives so that another country, in this case Afghanistan, can adapt, so that they can have a democracy like the one that we enjoy in this country. They're willing to literally risk their lives to support initiatives that support a democracy in that country. We have people in this country that don't even have 10 minutes to get up off the couch and make an effort to go to the local church or the local school and vote. I think this is quite odd. Hopefully, we can educate people and encourage them and give them a reason to get out and vote.

The second thing that strikes me, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that young people, particularly young women, tell me: "There is no reason to vote. What's the sense? It's not going to make any difference anyway." I remind people all the time, if they were to think about this, that their grandmothers, when they were young, probably didn't have the right to vote. Certainly, their great-grandmothers would not have had the vote. Women in the past, less than 100 years ago, went on hunger strikes, were willing to go to jail, and were willing to protest nonviolently to ensure that all women had the franchise to vote. I can't imagine what our country was like before women had the right to vote. Mr. Chairman, at one point you had to be of a certain religion or you had to own property and you had to be male in order to vote. We know that that's just wrong. We know all the arguments that were made to suggest that women should not have the right to vote. Those arguments were wrong.

4:50

I always make an effort to point out, particularly to young women: "It's not that long ago that women had to fight for the right to vote. Why are you dismissing the franchise that people fought for so vigorously so that you could have the right to vote?" It puzzles me why people don't vote. I am of the opinion that political parties – all of us are guilty – are not giving them a reason to vote. There are individuals in this country that are willing to sacrifice their lives so that others can have the vote while some of us sit on the couch, unwilling to make an effort to vote on election day.

If we continue down this pattern of electronic voting – now, I know that there are members in this House that think that they can just hop off the couch, take two steps, take the cushion out of the chair, sit in the chair before the computer, and vote. There are members – and I would encourage them to participate in the debate on this issue – who think this is the answer.

I reject that because I'm not confident that the system is foolproof. When you look at what happened in Florida and you read the op-ed pieces and the opinion pieces in the *New York Times* – and I know the members across the way may consider that to be a Liberal newspaper, but it's a very good newspaper. I would encourage

them, if they have any time on the weekends, to have a squint at it. The *New York Times*, over the years since the incident I described earlier in Florida, has published a lot of articles regarding electronic voting and the potential for voter fraud. It's significant, and it's a significant risk. I don't think we should jeopardize our voting system here.

We have the lists. I know we can improve the lists. I think we should have an enumeration before each and every election. I know that there have been improvements made through the municipal census, through federal income tax information, and the co-ordinating of the different levels of governments with that list, but I think that there should be an enumeration. I don't think it is an unreasonable cost. When we have an enumeration with an accurate polling list, when we have that broken down by poll, and we have trained volunteers to conduct the election, I think it can be fair for every candidate in every political party.

But I am yet to be convinced that electronic voting is not open to fraud. Hon. members will say: "Well, you can make billions of dollars of transactions on the Internet; you can do that routinely. People do that. We are becoming a society where there is less paper. There is a significantly reduced paper trail, and there's more and more information being transmitted between parties electronically." I know that is true. I accept the argument, Mr. Chairman, that banks carry on transactions, and there are electronic contracts. In fact, there is a book I was looking at the other day in the library just on that very subject.

That being said, I am not convinced that for each individual who is listed to vote, even if we have these unique identification numbers – and to me it's frightening that we would even be talking about that – there is no way that we can guarantee that the system will not be compromised or that the integrity of the system will not be jeopardized. That is one reason why I'm very suspicious of this attempt to initiate electronic voting.

We talked earlier, Mr. Chairman, about this identifier, this voter ID, so to speak. I don't think that we need that on the list of electors in each respective poll. If there are any questions, we can just pull out our driver's licence or ID and show that to the election officials and get our ballot. It might take a minute or two longer, and the lineup may be five people instead of two, but that's not much of a price to pay whenever you consider that people are willing to jeopardize or risk their lives to promote democracy in another country. Certainly, I would urge all members of this Assembly to think very, very thoroughly before we open up our election process to electronic voting.

Now, moving on in the time that I have, Mr. Chairman, this is a very interesting bill. I'm looking specifically at section 134. The section 134 that we know is repealed, and the following is substituted:

Printed or electronic advertising.

134(1) In this section, "advertisement" means an advertisement, for which there is or normally would be a charge, in any broadcast, print or electronic media, including telephone, fax, internet, e-mail and text messaging, with the purpose of promoting or opposing any registered political party or the election of a registered candidate.

(2) Every advertisement containing a reference to any election shall include the sponsor's name and contact information and indicate that the sponsor authorizes the advertisement.

I can certainly accept that.

(3) Subsection (2) . . .

This is the identification of the sponsor's name and contact information.

. . . does not apply to a printed or electronic advertisement bearing only one or more of the following:

(a) the colours and logo of a registered political party;

(b) the name of a registered political party;

(c) the name of a candidate.

Does this section allow for a campaign phone canvass, the demon dialer? We talked about the demon dialer earlier in debate, and many campaigns . . . [interjection] The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont seems to be quite fond of the demon dialer.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore utilizes the demon dialer. I guess it depends on how much money you have.

Certainly, I would like to know if this subsection applies to the demon dialer. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments. The hon. member started – and I lost track of what he was talking about after a while, but it was a little bit disingenuous, I think – by provoking Airdrie-Chestermere about the repeal of section 97. If he'd read the act, he'd realize that in the provisions of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act third-party advertising had been built into the act.

Mr. MacDonald: Not all of them.

Mr. Hancock: Well, you could point out some of those, but it's the normal course, when you're revising an act, to bring things into the appropriate sections, and the coming into force sections are clearly transitional provisions.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, earlier today we had discussions with the House leaders, and it was thought that it might be appropriate, once we'd dealt with the amendments that were coming to the floor, that we adjourn debate on this particular bill and move on with other business and come back to this bill later. Accordingly I would move that the committee adjourn debate on Bill 7.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

Bill 12

Body Armour Control Act

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

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act. I'd like to begin by thanking those who support this bill. The proposed legislation would allow the police to seize body armour from individuals who do not have a permit who are not exempt from the requirement of obtaining a permit. Police officers, peace officers, emergency medical service providers, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission inspectors, licensed private security guards, and others who need to wear body armour to do their jobs will be exempt from the requirement to get a permit.

This bill is drafted to ensure that law-abiding Albertans can continue to own and wear body armour. One of the ways the law does that is by exempting anyone who owns a valid firearms licence from having to get a separate permit for body armour. Recreational shooters, hunters, and gun owners more generally have firearms

licences so will not be impacted by this act. Other individuals may be issued a permit on the basis that they have legitimate occupational or personal safety reasons to wear body armour.

This proposed legislation defines body armour to include garments or other items that are designed or adapted to protect the wearer from a weapon or other object used to cause injury or death. The proposed legislation does not apply to safety equipment used in sporting and recreational activities, nor does it apply to safety equipment worn to protect against workplace injuries; for example, safety equipment worn by loggers or meat cutters.

The permit system will be modelled on the licensing scheme contained in the Security Services and Investigators Act. Several provisions in this proposed legislation are modelled on that act. Applications will be processed by the registrar designated under that act, and applicants will be subject to rigorous criminal record and background checks. Violations of the act will be punishable by a fine or a short custodial sentence or both.

Mr. Chairman, by taking away gang members' sense of invincibility, we hope to decrease the potential for violence in public places.

I thank all members for participating in this debate and look forward to their feedback.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Ms Blakeman: I'm never incredibly keen on things where civil liberties are used as an excuse on either side, but clearly we are up against a societal challenge that we need to give government some tools to deal with, and gangs are one of them. They don't play fair, they don't play by the rules, and they're making it very difficult for well-intentioned organizations and individuals to be able to protect our citizens from being recruited into gangs.

In my constituency I have a number of communities that have escaped from war, have perhaps lived in refugee camps. These people are not unfamiliar with weapons; let me put it that way. We're trying to help them integrate into quite a different society. For younger people who see money and cars and nice stereos and a sense of family or belonging, it can be an irresistible lure. Then to have gang members who can walk into bars with body armour on and be invincible, it's even more difficult.

Sometimes I think we pass laws because we believe this will solve a problem, and all we do is create a whole bunch of other problems and a whole bunch of other work and cost and red tape, which irritates me because it just isn't thought through. I haven't been able to poke the holes in this legislation that I was expecting to be able to. I've looked through the list of exemptions. [interjections] Oh, it's got to be spring. The marijuana people are outside. Yeah, it's a long day. [interjection] Yes, there are many, many constituents of Edmonton-Centre that are currently on the Legislature Grounds. No question about it.

But in looking at the exceptions, it's essentially saying that anybody that would usually have a gun or who has a legitimate reason for having a gun also has access to this without additional permitting. It certainly covers our public employees, which I think should be paramount when we look at protecting firefighters and police officers and EMS personnel and wildlife officers, that my father still calls the fish feds. He has no love for them, I'll tell you. He'll be thrilled to hear that they have body armour. The one that I do find interesting is that the gaming and liquor control people are exempted from the requirement to hold a permit.

I'm aware, having listened to the Tannoy when I was back in my office, that there was a fairly vigorous give-and-take on this one, but I'm not finding what's being proposed here inappropriate. I'm not finding it putting any particular hardship or disadvantage on one

group or another here. I think we struggle to be able to find out how to work with organizations like the sort of new version of gangs that exist in a highly technical, Internet-based world and move about in a way that we find difficult to track and control.

As much as I don't like putting those kinds of restrictions out, at this point I'm willing to support this legislation in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel it's important to once again rise and speak against this bill. There are just so many areas that need to be addressed. I understand the intent of the bill, but the question is: what are going to be the results? Are the outcomes going to match the intent? I just have to say that, no, I don't see how they are, any more than gun control and registering long guns have reduced the incidence of guns and those areas with that.

It's interesting. There's no question that we have a dilemma and need some tools to deal with, in fact, the gangs and those members who come into a bar and want to boast or act invincible because they're wearing body armour. I think that we should be able to pass legislation so that when someone comes in making threats or making intimidations and is wearing body armour – we could pass legislation that would allow for some pretty steep fines or some strict penalties, some time in jail for individuals that were wearing it and making threats.

I do not see the value in having to go through a process in order to get hold of body armour, especially when it comes to the question of: is this going to stop gang members from using it? In a small way maybe it might, but I think it just increases the black market, actually adds to their economic activities that go on when we have to register or have to have special – what would I say? – licensing to get hold of body armour.

I don't see how this is going to be a real tool that's going to in fact help the police deal with gangs. That's the number one reason that we hear, that this is a tool in order to address the gang activities. Again, it's been brought up several times by many members here in this House about these individuals that are going into a public place, bragging that they have on body armour, and making those threats.

Like I say, let's address that issue, that problem, not a general one that says: well, you no longer are able to get body armour or wear it unless you have a special licence. Again, you know, I understand the importance, that as a society safety is always a critical issue that we try and look at to ensure that our citizens are safe. Like I say, it does allow the police to have this tool where they can pull someone over to see: well, are you licensed to have this vest?

5:10

I think that this, then, opens up the next problem. I think it'll be amazing how many individuals will be able to go and get a licence and say, "Well, I've had threats on my life," on these other activities or whatever it is, be able to get a licence to get body armour even though their intent and their use are going to be illegal otherwise. Then we're going to be in a situation where it's legally acceptable because they've used the legal process to acquire a bulletproof vest or a stab-proof vest.

I just would urge the members of the House to reconsider the purpose of this bill. Is it in fact going to address the gang problems that we have? Like I say, in my mind, as I try and think through the process and how those people who want them are going to acquire them, I think they're going to have the loopholes to be able to get them. You know, I just have to wonder: what are we really going to

accomplish in this other than restrict people who might for whatever reason want to get body armour and be nervous, not wanting to go and get licensed and going through the questions or whatever else? Again, I just think this is government taking a step that is too far, unnecessary. [interjection] Well, I know you can get one.

Mr. Chair, we just really need to look at it and say: "Is this going to stop the gangs? Is it going to stop someone from going into a bar?" Like I say, my thought process as I go through is that, yes, it might reduce a few, but the biggest concern I have is that it's going to increase the economic activity of those on how to get a vest.

Ms Blakeman: Black market vests.

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

Again, though, the experts are a whole group of people that are going to provide the legitimate reasons in order for someone to get a vest. Like I say, those whom we least want to have them will probably get registered, get licensed, and will be wearing these. I'd urge the members of the House to vote against this bill. It's unnecessary. It doesn't accomplish what we need.

Then the other area to look at. When we start making these lists and the cost in maintaining them and who's going to want to access those lists, again for the poor reasons that they want to do this, we're jeopardizing the system. Again, we have limited funds here in the province. We're not able to fund the police forces the way they want. They're always asking for more money, looking for new tools, new equipment, yet we're going to go sideways here and say: "Well, if we do these things, it's going to be a benefit. It's not going to cost very much."

Again, I'd just go back to what we've learned with the long gun registry: "This will only be a million or two." It's been over a billion. Everybody says: "Oh, no. This is going to be a simple process; you know, the papers. It's not going to be expensive." But the fact of the matter is that we're going to have to hire people in order to process the paperwork to do this. Those could be two people that could be out on the street, two people that could be actually assigned to gang activity. Maybe it's one person; maybe it's 20. I don't know how many it's going to be. It's hard to envision the demand or what's going to happen here. Again, I just think we need to focus. What is it that we want to do? This is a Band-Aid solution. I think the Band-Aid is going to fall off fairly quickly, and we're going to say: well, what have we accomplished here?

Again, I'd just urge the members to reconsider. What is this bill's intent? Is it going to accomplish those things? I don't believe it will. This isn't the tool that we want to give police officers to go after the gangs and those people that are going into public areas and putting on the body armour and making those threats. That's who we want to target. That's where we need a law. Those people that are acting aggressively, making threats in public, and wearing body armour: we want to penalize them. I hope that the members of the House will vote against this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to reiterate my opposition to this bill. Again, I just don't understand. The inconsistency just confuses me. I really do want to honestly hear a response to this from government members if any of them are willing to do it. I mean, most of the members on that side of the House, I would say the vast majority of them, opposed the long gun registry out of Ottawa. I know most, if not all, the rural MLAs certainly did. I'm

assuming most of them over there – I don't have, you know, the record about that for every single MLA, but my guess, my sense was that most of them, if not the vast majority of them, were opposed to that.

Here we have a long gun registry in Canada that we've been fighting as a province against for a very long time. There, of course, you have it brought in by the eastern, federal Liberal Party, and they wanted every long gun to be registered. They thought that that would somehow curb crime and gun shootings in the cities or in the country. As we all know, it was a huge debacle. It was supposed to be just a few million dollars to set this registry up, and it turned into a billion-dollar boondoggle. It was a total failure. It didn't do anything to curb crime, all that sort of thing. So we have this, and rightfully we were opposed to it as a province. Most of the MLAs, anyway, in this Assembly across the way were opposed to it.

Now we move over to body armour. I have absolutely no problem with saying that if someone is using body armour in the furtherance of or carrying out of a crime or a gang shooting or something, I have absolutely no issue with tacking on an extra dollar amount or an extra jail time or whatever to say that that's not allowable. I understand what the police are trying to achieve there, and I would support that.

How do we then jump from that, which is a good goal, a laudable goal, and say: "Look. You know what? In order to enforce this, we're going to make sure that every single person who owns body armour has to license it." It just doesn't make any sense whatsoever. It's the same issue. Criminals are not going to license their body armour. What gang member is going to go and license his body armour? It just doesn't add up. It's absolutely a contradiction to say that you oppose the gun registry, but you're in favour of the body armour licensing registry. You've got, you know, some members saying: oh, the registry is different than licensing. No, it is not. It costs money to do this. You have to set up the process; you have to track it. We're against the long gun registry, but we're for a body armour registry. It makes no sense, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to hear from the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on this issue, why he supports the body armour registry. I'd like to hear from the hon. minister of agriculture on why he supports the body armour registry. I definitely would love to hear from the Minister of Transportation on why he is in favour of the body armour registry and how he thinks this is any different from the long gun registry, which I know he's opposed to. It just makes no sense. The Deputy Premier: I'd like to get his thoughts on it. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills: I want to know his thoughts on that. Obviously, I know he's against the long gun registry. I know that. Why is he going to vote for this bill, or is he going to vote for this bill? The inconsistency is just through the roof.

I understand what they're trying to do. They're trying to make it difficult. They don't want people walking in, gang members walking into bars with body armour and intimidating everybody and all that sort of thing. I understand that. That's fine. The answer to that is not to make everybody, all law-abiding citizens who want to use it . . . [interjection] Well, I know it's difficult for someone like yourself, Minister, to understand, but there are a lot of people that make their living in very dangerous environments. For example, some people live in rough areas of town, and they feel better if they put on a vest because they think their 7-Eleven or somewhere might get ripped off. They might want to wear a piece of body armour. So now they have to register it? Come on. There's no point to this.

5:20

Just because members of this Assembly don't wear it doesn't mean that others don't want to wear it. I mean, there are websites

you can go to and buy this stuff, so there's obviously a market for it. You know, it's not just police officers buying it. But the gang member who buys this stuff is not going to go and register it.

That's not what happened with the long gun registry. With the long gun registry at the very least you could say, well, at least you were registering something that could shoot somebody. Absolutely. A gun can obviously be used to kill somebody. There's no doubt about that. So there was that excuse. It didn't work. It was a bad idea. Most of us here were opposed to it. But at least you had that legitimate excuse that, yes, this is a weapon that can kill someone. But body armour? Mr. Chair, how is body armour going to kill somebody? Body armour is meant to protect people.

What are we going to register next? Are we going to register – I don't know – knives? Are we going to register mace? You know, a young lady who wants to go jogging and likes to bring mace with her – I know my wife takes mace with her in her little pack when she's out on her jog. And many, many people do the same thing. So why would we make that something you would need to register? You wouldn't do it. It's absolutely ridiculous that we're taking something that is essentially a protective device, something that is meant to protect people's lives, and we're making it essentially something that people, law-abiding citizens, have to go and register. That's certainly not the right thing to do by any stretch.

Again, I'd like to hear from the various different ministers. I'd like to hear from the minister of housing. I know he was dead against the long gun registry, so why is he for the body armour licensing registry? Definitely the Member for Battle River-Wainwright was against the long gun registry. What's changed, in his view, that he would support the body armour registry? It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

It's a boondoggle. It's a waste of money. If we're going to expend resources, we should be expending resources on hiring more officers. If we're going to set aside however many millions of dollars it's going to be to administer this, we should instead take that money and put it into new Internet child exploitation teams, ICE teams, in other words. We should put it into more officers. We should put it into other things. There are about 30 other law enforcement mechanisms that we should be putting money into rather than expending money on registering protective body armour.

With that, I would like to get some answers from the government side. I don't know if they will or not. At least just give me the justification for why you would support this bill, but you didn't support the long gun registry. I find those positions to be very inconsistent.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on Bill 12? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 13

Securities Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 13, the Alberta Securities Amendment Act, 2010. I was pleased to see that there were no issues raised at second reading, so I'd like to take a moment to remind members of the purpose of this bill. Bill 13 continues the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the past five years under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. As such, this bill includes amendments that ensure Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments that strengthen regulatory enforcement and then further harmonize the registration regime in support of the passport system.

In terms of specifics, section 16 of the bill deals with the regulation of credit-rating organizations. What Bill 13 will do is adopt a new framework for regulating credit-rating organizations, the same framework that will be adopted across Canada. This new framework will require credit-rating organizations that want to be able to rate certain products and others that rely on that rating for regulatory purposes to meet the framework's criteria and apply to have the organization designated. This is key to strengthening the Alberta Securities Commission's ability to protect investors.

Bill 13 also contains amendments related to Canada's conversion to international financial reporting standards, or IFRS. IFRS is fast becoming the global language of accounting for public entities, making it easier to conduct business internationally and to raise funds through easier access to global markets. The move to IFRS will mean that our issuers' financial information will be readily comparable with issuers in other countries. The amendments in sections 2, 4, 8, 20, and 21 of the bill will facilitate the move to IFRS by January 1, 2011, by replacing existing terms with IFRS terms where necessary. This may seem like a minor point, but it's needed to help ensure a smooth transition for all involved.

Other amendments in Bill 13 are focused on regulatory enforcement. Sections 6, 7, and 10 to 13 will make sure that our legislation continues to be harmonized, streamlined, and up to date. This includes an amendment to strengthen regulatory enforcement to provide a timely means of dealing with issuers that refuse to rectify, clarify, or explain misleading disclosure. This will be done by broadening the powers of the Alberta Securities Commission and its executive director to issue a cease-trade order in instances of faulty disclosure. Again, this is about protecting investors. Investors need to have adequate, appropriate information on investment products so they can determine the risks involved and if the investment is right for them.

Moving along, section 17 of Bill 13 provides for further registration reform. These amendments will ensure that Alberta registration provisions are fully harmonized with the registration provisions elsewhere across Canada. Essentially we'll be replacing the term "deal in securities" with trading in securities as adopted by other jurisdictions and harmonizing the definition of dealer. We need to be sure we're speaking the same language as our counterparts, which will keep our dealings with other jurisdictions co-ordinated and co-operative.

Finally, section 19 of the bill deals with cost recovery. Currently there is an artificial distinction between costs associated with an investigation and those of a hearing. The amendment will make it easier for the Alberta Securities Commission to recover costs in the case of a person or company who has been found in contravention of Alberta's securities laws.

Before I conclude, I'd like to touch briefly on Alberta's constitutional challenge of the move to a national securities regulator. During second reading the rationale behind why we launched our reference and why we joined Quebec's reference was explained. I'm

pleased to say that Quebec has agreed to join in our reference, sending a strong message of support for provincial jurisdiction over securities regulation. Intervening in support of each other's constitutional reference allows the two provinces to share resources and co-operate in addressing this important constitutional question.

5:30

As you've heard, Bill 13 is intended to help keep our securities legislation as up to date as possible. This requires ongoing reform, and as Alberta is the second-largest capital market in Canada, it's vital that we continue to show global leadership. This is important for Alberta, and this is important for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon at committee on Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010. I certainly appreciate the efforts of the hon. Member for Red Deer-South regarding this bill. I appreciate his remarks. Certainly, whenever we look at this amendment as presented by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise – and I understand it, again, to harmonize the passport system that originated with the memorandum of understanding from 2004 between the federal and the provincial governments and that the province of Ontario was excluded in that. Since then there have been changes, changes politically and changes to many different financial regulations.

The amendments in Bill 13 also support Canada's conversion to the international financial reporting standards. We are creating also a framework here, as I said earlier, for regulating credit-rating organizations. We will allow the Alberta Securities Commission to impose sanctions for late filing of disclosure. That is more similar to the model in British Columbia. Also, as the hon. member noted, there are further amendments to ensure that Alberta's registration regime is harmonized with other provinces.

It is our view that we should support this bill. There are some outstanding issues regarding securities regulation that I think we need to discuss. I think we're going to see more changes, more amendments.

These amendments will allow for the harmonization or mutual recognition of securities regulators in Canada through the passport system. Every year for the last six years, as I understand it, we have made amendments to security legislation across the country to bring the language in the legislation onto a common baseline. There is a lot of discussion, a lot of back and forth between the provinces over the legislative changes as one province would amend their legislation and then others would have to re-amend their legislation to bring it in line with the others and so on. The passport system is continually updated and harmonized as other provinces amend their securities legislation.

This bill – and we've got to point this out, Mr. Chairman – does not address the idea of a national securities regulator, but it is interesting to note there are currently 13 provincial and territorial securities regulators across Canada rather than a single national regulator. Now, Mr. Flaherty, the federal Finance minister, has been quoted as saying that Canada is the only industrialized country without a single securities regulator, and the *Globe and Mail* reported that Canada is one of only two countries in the 103-member International Organization of Securities Commissions without a national overseer.

Over the last few years all of the provinces, as I said earlier, excluding Ontario, had begun implementing a passport system which mutually recognizes the rules within each provincial regulator in order to facilitate transactions across borders. The federal govern-

ment has been advocating for a national regulator, with resistance from B.C., Alberta, and, of course, as the hon. member noted, Quebec. B.C. has recently softened to the idea, but Alberta and Quebec continue to oppose the implementation of a national regulator. Over a year ago, in January 2009, a federal report led by a former Conservative minister, Tom Hockin, was released that recommended a national regulator, including provisions meant to accommodate the concerns raised in western Canada and Quebec such as regional offices being established in Vancouver, Calgary, and Montreal and a provision to allow provinces to opt in to the single regulator.

There was also a recommendation for a market participant opt-in for registrants and issuers who could elect to be regulated by the federal regulator. The current Minister of International and Inter-governmental Relations, as I understand it, responded by threatening legal action if national regulation is implemented, claiming it would be an infringement on provincial jurisdiction and that a regulator centralized in Ontario would not understand the unique market circumstances within Alberta. I can understand a bit of that, where the hon. minister would be coming from, particularly with the energy sector, particularly the junior oil and gas sector, in Calgary. They have certainly pointed out where their needs to raise money are unique to Alberta. But we certainly didn't have to wait long, of course, for our province to react and to challenge through the judicial system. [interjections] I believe they're talking about the airport tunnel in Calgary, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Anyway, keep talking with me, Member, and hopefully the other members will sort of quiet down so we can hear each other.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, before Christmas we found out that Alberta is to launch a court challenge over the federal move to create a national securities regulator. It's interesting – I know this is in the courts, and it will be winding its way through the courts – to see the political dynamics of this. You have the Conservative Prime Minister from Calgary. You have the Conservative finance minister in this government also from Calgary. Yet we find ourselves launching a court challenge provincially over the federal government's initiative to create this national securities regulator.

I can remember campaigning during the Calgary-Glenmore by-election. I don't want to keep bringing this up, but I happened upon a couple of houses, and the residents were very, very upset over the changes to some of the income trusts. Those changes, of course, had been initiated by the Conservative Prime Minister. These individuals took exception to that major change to income trusts. They expressed their opinion, as I recall, very, very vividly about this. I thought: hmm, what's this all going to mean?

I know people – and I can appreciate this – watch their investments very, very closely and can be very, very disappointed when for one reason or another, without any sort of formal announcement, there are changes; the playing field is changed. They may lose a significant part of their investment as a result of that. That's why we have to have a regulatory system that people have confidence in.

5:40

Certainly, these investors did not have confidence in the initiative that was originally started by the Conservative Prime Minister. How this relationship with our minister of finance is going to help or hinder further negotiations around whether this is provincial jurisdiction or a federal intrusion into provincial jurisdictions is going to be interesting to see. We know the Alberta government is going to the Court of Appeal here in the province to test the constitutional soundness of the federal government's move to create

a single Canadian securities regulator. It's going to be interesting to see how this plays out.

According to the Alberta Finance and Enterprise broadsheet here, Securities regulation is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, and acknowledging federal authority in this area would have implications in other areas of financial regulation that have historically been provincial responsibility . . . The interests of Albertans and the Alberta capital market are best served by the existing regulatory structure. There is no need for this intrusion into provincial jurisdiction.

We're sort of unique here, Mr. Chairman. We're the only province or state, as a matter of fact, with our own state-owned bank, the Alberta Treasury Branches. I don't know if that's what the hon. minister was referring to or not, but that's an interesting take on this. How do we regulate that? What do outsiders or others think about us? You know, we're known for our free enterprise and independent spirit, yet we have a state-owned bank.

Alberta, as I understand it, is also intervening – and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South brought this up – in support of a similar challenge by the provincial government in Quebec to the Quebec Court of Appeal.

Joining with Quebec will allow the two provinces to share resources and co-operate in other aspects of the two cases. It also sends a stronger message of opposition to the federal plans [of Mr. Harper and Mr. Flaherty].

Alberta will argue the federal move to enact federal securities legislation and establish a single national securities regulator represents an unwarranted expansion of the federal trade and commerce constitutional power, opening the door to the federal regulation of other areas that have historically been regulated by the provinces. This could impact many areas that are currently considered to be matters of [exclusive] provincial responsibility. It could also hinder investment opportunities for small Alberta businesses.

Well, I hope not. I certainly hope that's not the case. I think the best thing we can do to enhance investment opportunities for small businesses is to keep our taxes low and competitive with the jurisdictions around us and ensure that we have a competitive economic playing field.

The federal [Conservative] government has announced its intention to ask the Supreme Court of Canada to confirm that it has the power to enact comprehensive legislation regulating securities. However, as it may be many months before [the federal government gets around to initiating this call], Alberta is moving forward now with its own reference and its intervention in Quebec's reference.

The province here certainly believes that this is an intrusion into an important area of provincial jurisdiction. We will see how this plays out in the courts.

Other than going to court, we certainly have other ways of dealing with this matter, in my view, legislative processes. It is odd – I shall put it to you this way, Mr. Chairman – that there would be this extreme difference of opinion between the federal Conservatives and their provincial cousins here in this province. My heart on this matter is with the provincial cousins because I think they are doing the right thing to just look at what is a provincial responsibility and what is a federal responsibility. This may take time, and it may cost money, but I think it's in the best interests of this province to follow that legal route.

Now, certainly, Mr. Chairman, when we look at the issue of the national securities regulator, it will unfold as these court cases wind their way through. I would think that it'll be next year and the year after that where we will have a similar amendment to what we're dealing with now to the securities legislation to reflect the yearly changes that occur. We know what people in the international investment community say, and we know how they feel regarding securities regulation. Certainly, they want to see a single regulator for this country. I don't know if that's an exceptionally good idea.

I know there are those who say: yes, we've got to get with the

times, and the proposed regional offices will work just fine. But I'm in the wait-and-see mode because there are those, whether they're in London, England, or in New York City or in Hong Kong, that would take exception to the idea or the statement from any individual that securities regulation has been working smoothly, that investors' interests are being looked after.

Certainly, that is not the case. We only have to look at the newspapers in the last couple of days and read about the activities at Goldman Sachs. We look at these activities, and we look at the accusations that have been made. That erodes investor confidence, Mr. Chairman.

You know, whenever someone from Brussels or someone from London or anywhere else, as a matter of fact, suggests that, well, maybe because we have this system that has one regulator here and another regulator there instead of a nationally co-ordinated regulatory body – maybe that's not as bad as it sounds. The economic storm that was caused because of inadequate or lax regulations or regulations that were not being enforced by the authorities in the financial sector created many problems, as we all know, but in this country we have been luckier than most.

I can remember vividly in the mid-90s, when the neo-cons were talking about deregulating the financial sector in this country, Mr. Chairman. Fortunately, it was Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin who thought: no, we have to keep a regulatory regime that is tight and is enforceable. I think history has proven them to be right.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. I will cede the floor to another hon. member. I believe that Bill 13 is a bill that should be supported. There are routine changes in this, but there are also some very interesting amendments. We will see how they work in the future. We will also see what happens as the province of Quebec's initiative winds through the courts and also the federal government's reference to the Supreme Court. We'll see how all this works out, but we'll probably be back here this time next year to make additional changes as necessary to the securities law.

Thank you.

5:50

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hearing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hearing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

**Bill 9
Local Authorities Election Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010**

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, as proposed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. Certainly, the passing and proclamation of the private member's Bill 203 stirred up a frenzy among municipalities. That frenzy, in my view, was justified. This legislation is intended to avoid some of the problems that municipalities identified, in particular a candidate's own campaign funds up to \$10,000, the volunteer services, the question of campaigns funds, and the limits on contributions on an annual, not a campaign period, basis. I certainly heard last year from various municipal leaders. They weren't satisfied with that private member's bill, and we have this bill before us now.

I had an opportunity to talk about this bill earlier. I had some questions around the consultation process regarding that private member's bill. We can see clearly where, you know, the government is making an effort. This is a legislative repair job. Hopefully, if the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, as we see it, is passed, it will be viewed as fair by municipal levels of government and all those individuals who would care to run for an elected position in any one of those elected governments.

I'm of the view, Mr. Chairman, that we in this Assembly should ensure that our own financial records and our own contributions are completely above board. I would like to see all the financial statements before we tell civic politicians what they can and cannot do. We should be ensuring that our books are in order. I brought this up many times in this Assembly before.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would just encourage, advise all hon. members of this Assembly that at any time they can go to Elections Alberta, go to the reading room, and they can have a look through the files that are there for each year going back, I think, into the '70s. Certainly, the records that are there, the financial statements, the disclosures that are there: we should read them. We should ask ourselves some questions after we read those disclosure statements because, in my view, going through some of them, there are outstanding questions.

For instance, Mr. Chairman, we're telling civic politicians what they can and cannot do. At the same time, we can have some constituency associations for some parties and some members that during the year have budgets. I can't imagine what that's like. We usually raise money and try to save as much as is possible for preparations for the next election. Some constituencies have

expenditures in the thousands of dollars a year. Some constituencies have sums in excess of \$50,000, \$60,000. Some of them have a hundred thousand dollars that are invested. I have no problem with that. Some of it is in GICs. Some of it is in trust accounts.

Exactly where does the money go that's spent, Mr. Chairman, by a constituency association? Some sums are quite large. I can see \$1,500 to rent a hall and have a volunteer party for constituency volunteers, the ones that are working on the association, something like that, but there are amounts in the thousands of dollars in some constituencies. We have no idea where it's going, and we should have a process that outlines where it goes. Does it go for travel expenses for the member? Does it go for travel expenses for the executive? Is it going to send people to political conventions? Is it paying for their registration? Is it paying for their hotels? All this money is made through donations. Many of these donations have a tax break associated with them, so it wouldn't be unusual to ask for the details of where this money goes, but we don't do it.

The Progressive Conservatives' foundation fund is another example of a fund that for a number of years wasn't reported accurately and according to the act, yet we can see fit to tell civic politicians what they can and cannot do. I think it's a double standard, and I would just like to point that out.

At some time, hopefully over the summer, I'm going to get an opportunity to go back to Elections Alberta and have a look at some of the disclosure statements. I would love to sit down with the new Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta. Hopefully, he can address some of my concerns because there are some issues there that either I'm not understanding, or we have a very, very lax process. I think we should fix our own books before we tell others what they can and cannot do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) we are in Committee of the Whole at this time and there's an evening sitting, so the chair now rises and leaves the chair until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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