



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, October 25, 2010

Issue 32

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Alberta Liberal: 8

Wildrose Alliance: 4

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Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 25, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back. I would ask members to remain standing after prayers and the national anthem so that we may pay tribute to former colleagues who have passed away.

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

I would now ask Mr. Paul Lorieu, who is in the Speaker's gallery, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

Hon. Members:

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

Mr. Dave Broda

September 17, 1944, to June 13, 2010

The Speaker: Hon. members, Mr. Dave Broda, former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the 682nd MLA sworn in, passed away on Sunday, June 13, 2010, at the age of 65 years.

Mr. Broda was first elected in the election held March 11, 1997, and served two terms until November 21, 2004. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Redwater for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Dave Broda served in the following committees: Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee. Mr. Broda served as chair of the Long Term Care Policy Advisory Committee, which authored *Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care*, commonly known as the Broda report, in 1999.

Mr. Nigel Ian Pengelly

May 29, 1925, to July 3, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. Nigel Ian Pengelly, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 536, passed away on Saturday, July 3, 2010, at the age of 85 years.

Mr. Pengelly was first elected in the election held March 14, 1979, and served three terms until March 19, 1989. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Innisfail for the Progressive Conservative Party. Mr. Pengelly served on the following committees: Select Committee on Recreational and Commercial Fishing Industries in Alberta, Select Special Committee to Examine the Role of the Upper House in the Canadian Federal System, Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Private Bills, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Standing Committee on the Alberta

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, Special Committee to Prepare and Report Lists of Members to Compose the Select Standing Committees, and the Special Select Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Miss Wilma Helen Hunley

September 6, 1920, to October 22, 2010

The Speaker: Miss Wilma Helen Hunley, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 475, and a former Lieutenant Governor, passed away on Friday, October 22, 2010. I will provide more words on Miss Hunley tomorrow, on Tuesday, October 26, 2010.

The Speaker: Family members of Mr. Broda are here with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you all to remember former hon. member Dave Broda and former hon. member Nigel Pengelly as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm honoured today to introduce to you all family members of our former colleague Dave Broda, who passed away since we last sat here in the Legislature. The family members are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask, as I introduce each family member, that they stand and at the end receive the warm welcome of the House, please. The family of the hon. Dave Broda: Mrs. Eileen Broda, spouse; Cindy Broda, daughter; Trina Broda, daughter; Susan Broda Olesko, daughter; Taylor Olesko, granddaughter; Mary Tachynski, sister; Kathy Tachynski, niece; Danny Tachynski, nephew; Patty Tachynski, niece. I would now ask all members to join with me in welcoming the family members of the hon. Dave Broda.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. First, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 60 enthusiastic and inquisitive grade 6 students from George P. Nicholson elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, in fact from my neighbourhood of Twin Brooks. The group of students is participating in the School at the Legislature, at least half of them are this week and half of them will be later on. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Maxine Sprague, along with parent helpers Mrs. Karen Brese, Mrs. Yuning Cui, and Mrs. Woytkiw. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent from Edmonton-Whitemud, Lori Simon. Lori is interested in the processes and proceedings of the House, and as her MLA I'm pleased to have her attend today. She is seated in the public gallery, and I'd like her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce Mr. Kevin Pizzey, a grade 5 teacher at C.P. Blakely elementary school in Sylvan Lake. Kevin is a resident of the Red Deer-South constitu-

ency, he's an active volunteer in the constituency in Red Deer-North, but he's here today as president of the ATA local in Chinook's Edge school division. I can always count on Kevin to keep me apprised of what's going on in the schools in Red Deer and its surrounding areas on issues relative to the profession and to education. Mr. Pizzey is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and to introduce to you and through you a very large group from Innisfail middle school. We have with us today 80 grade 6 students from Innisfail middle school, who are seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers and helpers. I think it's so important that Alberta children visit our Legislature. As you know, they will be our leaders of tomorrow. I would like to introduce the teachers and the parent helpers. We have teachers Mrs. Dale Jensen, Mrs. Tanis Klymyk, Mr. Tom Stones, Mrs. Dawn Peters. We have Mrs. Denise Lester, Mrs. Leona Marshall, Mr. Tim Donald, Mr. Len McCook, Ms Gail Vander Vliet, Mrs. Jenna Grant, Mrs. Liana Jackson, Mrs. Ronda Leonard, and Mrs. Lisa Allan. I would like them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to defer it until after question period if I may.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of individuals from the office of the Ombudsman. These individuals are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to ask them to rise and remain standing: Gordon Button, the Alberta Ombudsman; Jolene Morin, executive assistant to the Ombudsman; Suzanne Richford, director of corporate services; Diane Smith, assistant to the director of corporate services. I'd like to ask the Assembly to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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 this Assembly some of Canada's finest: staff and students of the Edmonton Garrison official languages centre. The Edmonton Garrison Language School and Official Languages Centre provides second-language training in English and French to the military community. We have with us here today Corporal Yan Landry, Private Eric Barbeau, Private Sebastien Toussaint, Private Dave Levesque, Private Nadia Lamoureux, Private Maude Loiseau, Private Michael Owen, Private Jean-Sebastien Roy, Private Jeremie Tremblay, Private Mathieu Paré, and our teachers Deborah Stasiuk and Crystal Fraser. I welcome them, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Richard Andersen. On August 3, 2010, Mr. Andersen began his tenure as the

president and CEO of Northlands. As a former general manager of Petco Park in San Diego and the executive vice-president of the San Diego Padres Mr. Andersen brings a wealth of experience to Northlands and to the city of Edmonton. Mr. Andersen is joined here today by his daughter Kathleen Andersen. Kathy is director of government and public relations at Northlands. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise, and I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce an Albertan who has demonstrated the forward thinking and intelligence of our former Premier Peter Lougheed, has demonstrated the charm and the Alberta advantage of former Premier Ralph Klein, and also the grassroot democracy and the principles associated with Preston Manning. Please join me in welcoming the leader of Alberta's newest official party, Danielle Smith.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly two guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. The first one is Guy Smith, the president of AUPE, representing staff at Valley Park Manor and Red Deer nursing home, and also Philipia Bates Renouf, vice-president of AUPE assigned to central Alberta. They've both come to the Legislature to see the tabling of the AUPE petition to save the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor from being closed this fall by Alberta Health Services. I'd ask my guests to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 19 students from the Concordia College business and government class. These students are accompanied by their teacher, a constituent of mine, Liam Connelly. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. They may still be on tour. I'm not sure. They were doing a tour of the Leg. If they're in the audience, please rise.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you want to introduce your guests now or at the conclusion of the Routine?

Ms Notley: I'll defer until after question period.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Brendan Fitzgerald and his mother, Anne Fitzgerald. Brendan and Anne are here today from CCSVI, a short term used to describe compromised flow of blood in veins. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, our Standing Order 7(1.1) indicates that exactly at 1:50 we shall interrupt and proceed to Oral Question Period. If I recognize the hon. minister now who wants to move with a ministerial statement, there is also recognition then afforded to a member from the Official Opposition to participate, and I suspect the Assembly will have a request from the Wildrose Alliance caucus and the ND caucus as well to participate in this ministerial statement.

I'm going to put forward a request to you. We're going to require unanimous consent, and the unanimous consent will include two things; first of all, that we proceed with Ministerial Statements time now, which means that the opening of question period will be deferred, and that at the same time approval will be provided to a spokesperson for the Wildrose Alliance Party and the ND Party and also to the Member for Calgary-Currie. Is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ministerial Statements

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

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address a serious health issue for Albertans. Tobacco consumption is the leading avoidable cause of premature death in Alberta. It is responsible for approximately 3,000 deaths each year in Alberta, ranging from cardiovascular disease to cancer to lung disease. Tobacco use has a significant impact on our quality of life and places a substantial burden on our health care system.

For these reasons in 2002 our government set out a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use by Albertans. This strategy included two tobacco tax increases, a province-wide smoking ban, and restrictions on tobacco displays and places where cigarettes can be sold. It also includes a provincial tobacco reduction strategy, in which we have invested \$9 million. These efforts have had success, and I am pleased to report that tobacco use is now at an all-time low in Alberta. The decline in tobacco use points to a strong cause-and-effect relationship between effective tobacco control policies and reduced consumption.

While we are heading in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, we know that we are far away from being able to declare any sort of victory. Tobacco use continues to impact Albertans. Our memories of Barb Tarbox continue to remind us of this impact. Her courage and the journey with cancer that she shared with all of us remind us that we need to persevere and that we need to do more, more to reduce the harmful effects of tobacco use on our society and more to lessen the burden that tobacco use places on our health care system.

That is why I am pleased to announce today that we will take another step to move our tobacco reduction strategy forward by initiating legal action to recover health care costs from the tobacco industry. Last year this Legislature passed a bill to facilitate litigation against tobacco manufacturers. We will now move to join British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Ontario and commence litigation. We are confident that this action is the right thing to do. Some of the most costly illnesses to treat, such as cancer and heart disease, are caused by smoking. The litigation that we plan to commence will seek to share this burden with the manufacturers of this product.

This move is a necessary and important part of our tobacco reduction strategy, a comprehensive strategy with a clear focus to

lessen the impact that tobacco has on the quality of life of Albertans and the burden it places on our health care system and also with the clear goal of reducing smoking in the future, especially amongst our youth. This government is committed to continued action on the tobacco reduction strategy, and I am pleased that my ministry is able to play a part in that.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Justice minister for rising today to inform us about what this government has done and continues to do in order to reduce tobacco consumption in Alberta. The Justice minister indicated that since 2002 this government has set out a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use by Albertans that included two tax increases, a province-wide smoking ban, restrictions on tobacco displays, and restrictions on places where cigarettes can be sold. Further, the hon. minister will begin initiating legal action to recover health care costs from the tobacco industry. I applaud this government for these actions.

The question remains, then: are we as an hon. House doing everything possible to reduce people's consumption of cigarettes? Sadly, I believe the answer is no. This government could do much more to lead by example and continue the battle against the use and abuse of cigarettes. There is a better way.

Here are a couple of examples of how we could do more. First, it is my understanding that this government continues to invest approximately \$60 million in tobacco-related companies. In all seriousness, how can this government claim to lead by example against the insidious nature of the tobacco industry when it is, in fact, a stockholder? If you truly wanted to lead by example, you would immediately divest this government of its shares in these companies. It's simply the right thing to do.

Secondly, I believe this government should look at banning the use of cigarettes in vehicles where children are present. We all know that second-hand smoke is deadly, and it's the government's first responsibility to protect Alberta's children. I don't know how many times I've seen individuals smoking with young children in the car. Governments should look at protecting these individuals and bring in legislation to stop people from smoking when travelling with kids.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the government on today's announcement, but I implore them to do much more in the continued fight against the insidious nature of cigarettes and the tobacco industry.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as at 1:30 this afternoon the Wildrose Alliance receives official party status in the Assembly of Alberta.

I now will call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We echo the sentiments of the Justice minister. The government needs to play an active and ongoing role in reducing tobacco consumption, and we do support the action being taken.

All Albertans remember very vividly the important advocacy work that Barb Tarbox did to speak out against tobacco use. I don't think anyone could forget the dramatic images of Barb's battle with cancer and the tremendous courage she displayed in travelling the country and putting herself front and centre as an example of the toll that tobacco can take.

Fortunately, thanks to the work of people like Barb and other advocacy groups, smoking in Alberta is on the decline. The smoking rate among Alberta youth aged 15 to 19 dropped from 24 per cent in 2001 to 15 per cent in 2006. The proportion of Alberta youth under 18 exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes is also down, dropping from 22 per cent in 2001 to just 10 per cent in 2006.

But as the minister said, more can be done. Far too many Albertans are still suffering from cancer, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and other tobacco-related illnesses, adding even more of a burden to our already malfunctioning health care system. That is why it is critical that we continue to drive home the message of preventative health care not only to improve lives for Albertans but also to alleviate the mounting pressure on our hospitals and emergency rooms.

As we will discuss later today, emergency rooms across the province are jammed and backed up to a breaking point. Every single day critically injured and ill patients are being denied the care they need partly because the message of basic preventative health care just isn't getting across.

The reduction we've seen in tobacco use is a positive example of what can be achieved with good advocacy, and the Wildrose caucus supports any action that shifts focus from treatment to prevention.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government deserves the sort of commendation that typically comes when you say, "Well, at last you've done the right thing" for this announcement that they will pursue litigation against the tobacco industry to recover health care costs. Thousands of Albertans have died and tens of thousands more have begun to smoke during the years that the government has procrastinated. With this issue as with so many others they have delayed action until the merits of the action were almost beyond obvious. Today, desperate to find anything to show that they are doing something positive in relation to the health of Albertans as their ineffective behaviour in relation to emergency department problems is exposed, they announce that this legal action is getting under way. Alberta should not be straggling in after other provinces on these matters. We should be setting the agenda in smart ways to ensure good health for Albertans.

Yes, it is appropriate to go after big tobacco for the costs resulting from their product sales; meanwhile, the need to adequately fund good health care, including a commitment to address the social determinants of health, is something that remains the responsibility of this government. As part of that, a good government would increase the investment in tobacco reduction actions from what is currently a million dollars per year so that the rates of use in the province would drop far more and the health care costs that this action today is designed to recoup would never be incurred in the first place.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all hon. members for granting me the opportunity to respond. A little over three years ago I lost my mother to cancer seven weeks after she was diagnosed with three inoperable brain tumours. She was 82, and while nobody can say for sure, given that her sister is hale and hearty today at 84, her mother lived to the age of 99, her mother's sister is still alive at the age of 93, my mother's grandfather lived to the age of 98, and my mother's great-grandfather did as well, I can't help

but wonder if mom would still be alive today if she hadn't been a smoker. While the brain tumours killed her, the doctor said that her primary cancer was the lung cancer that they thought they'd caught early a year and a half before, the lung cancer that showed up several years after she quit smoking.

Mom was never a heavy smoker. She only smoked about six or seven cigarettes a day, and this was back in the day when people smoked anywhere, any time. When she did quit, she was able to give it up without much in the way of withdrawal symptoms. Probably she could have quit at any time, but she went on smoking six or seven cigarettes a day for 50-plus years, and she never exhibited any of the health problems normally linked with smoking until they found that tumour on her lung.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. minister for doing the right thing today. Predictably, the argument will be made that tobacco manufacturers are engaged in a legal business, making a product that is legal to manufacture and sell to consenting adults. The tobacco industry and their spin doctors have hidden behind that claim of legal status for far too long, using it as, if you will, a smokescreen to manufacture and sell a highly addictive product that, if used as directed, will kill you. Every time that it costs a smoker's life, in the lead-up to that it burdens our health care system. The minister is right. It's time that burden was shared with the industry that's responsible for causing it.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Legislative Assembly Proceedings Broadcast

The Speaker: Hon. members, last week I provided to hon. members a sheet identifying the rotation for question period today. I won't go through that now, but later during the Routine I will table those documents once again and make a comment at the conclusion of the Routine for the records of our Assembly.

Two other items as well. Over the summer and the spring the Legislative Assembly Office has been involved in a major project here in this Assembly to update our broadcast equipment, including robotic cameras, recordings, graphics control systems. We now have five cameras instead of two cameras, which will provide us with an improved final product, including more options for shots and camera angles with improved picture quality and, hopefully, sound quality as well.

I would like to advise all that live coverage of the question period will be broadcast daily on Access TV and rebroadcast on Shaw TV at 5 every afternoon with a repeat broadcast to major centres at 10:30 p.m. Your ratings have actually been quite good to attain three broadcasts a day. In addition to that, we'll continue to provide live gavel-to-gavel broadcast coverage of all House proceedings through our website through a new program called Assembly Online.

I'd like to advise members that we now have also arrived at the continuation of an agreement between the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and Television Montana, TVMT, to broadcast and rebroadcast proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Montana. This agreement started today at 1:30 on Television Montana cable television channels. It was, as I said, 1:30 today and will broadcast Monday through Thursday to the end of the daily Routine when the Assembly is in session.

2:00

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: We will now commence for today. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For years now this government has promised Albertans they would fix health care. They've done report after report, shelving them one after the other. They've ripped money from the system and then thrown money at the problems they'd created. Now new reports say that we don't have enough beds. Once again we're putting lives at risk, and the emergency departments and doctors and nurses are at the end of their ropes. Mr. Premier, for years you have promised the best health care system to Albertans. We don't have the best health care system. When is it going to be delivered?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the key priority of our government is to have the best performing publicly funded health care system in Canada. We know that there are emergency room pressures. Patients don't want to see that, doctors don't want to see that, health care professionals don't want to see that, and neither do we. The minister has a plan in place that will alleviate some of the pressure, and he'll be able to answer the rest of the questions with respect to his plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it's unclear to every Albertan, including us, what that plan might be. I expected excuses, but please give us the respect due to Albertans in this most vital service. Emergency rooms around the province are crowded, crowded to the hilt. Mr. Premier, why doesn't every Albertan have a family doctor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has indicated that I will take these questions that deal with details and specifics. What I would like to do is start by directing the hon. member, who himself, of course, is an acknowledged and respected doctor, to the press release that was put out on October 20 wherein a four-point plan for addressing these pressures was clearly outlined. That is part of the larger plan, the five-year funding commitment, that will surely help address and reduce some of those pressures in emergency departments.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to be unwilling to answer the question. Why doesn't every family have a family doctor?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways to answer that question. Some people that I've met with may not want a family doctor or feel they don't need one, but that's not the main thing. We do have a shortage of doctors in some areas of the province. This is true. Some people have indicated that there are doctor shortages in some areas of the province, and that's why we have a very active physician recruitment plan, probably the most active plan on a per capita basis in Canada. We are recruiting some of the youngest people into the system. We pay them to settle in some of the remote areas. We have an active rural physician action plan, and that is starting to yield some results. It's very difficult to recruit to some areas for the numbers we'd like, but we are getting there.

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

Additional Beds To Relieve Emergency Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan to add 250 beds to

Calgary and Edmonton hospitals was rushed and provides no details. No specifics were given for the number or type of beds or what the total cost would be. If there are no specifics, then there is no real plan. Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. Again to the Premier: was this announcement of new beds simply to deflect attention away from the fact that the proposed Alberta Health Act won't actually fix any of the problems Albertans care about?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are the only jurisdiction, the government of Alberta, that has provided predictable, five-year funding to the Alberta Health Services Board. That means that the board can plan over the next five years: the first three years a 6 per cent increase, and the other two will be a 4 and a half per cent increase to an ever-increasing budget. We also eliminated their deficit, and we topped up the operating funds for Alberta Health Services to meet what they said at that time were the pressures that they were experiencing. The minister and the board are working out a plan. They have announced part of that plan. There's more to come to alleviate the pressure.

Dr. Swann: Please, Mr. Premier, you talk about predictable funding. There is no new funding under Alberta Health Services to go along with the 250 beds. Please, what areas are going to be cut in order for these beds to be open, or was Alberta Health Services sitting on cash that they haven't spent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, why is it that any time we want to improve performance, the opposition always calls for more money? Can we not improve performance within the envelope that's provided, not only paying off the deficit but also topping up their budget and then adding 6 per cent onto the top of it? That's a substantial increase. I've asked them just to deliver the plan. First thing they go is: how much more money? You look for better performance by Alberta Health Services given the dollars allocated.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it's one thing to announce new beds, but it's another to tell us where the money is coming from. What is the plan, Mr. Premier? Where is the money coming from for these beds? Why was that not made clear at the time of the announcement?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, a 6 per cent increase over a budget that was increased to meet the demands that Alberta Health Services brought forward to the table when we entered into a five-year funding agreement. The money is there, 6 per cent funding today. They can move money around. I know – I have trust in the board – that they will deliver on not only opening more beds immediately but looking after some of the other pressures that we have coming forward.

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

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans support the Liberal policy for a moratorium on the sale of Crown-owned land. Unfortunately though, we have a government hiding behind a loophole in legislation and selling our land to a private owner, a friend of the government, behind closed doors. While this has become common practice with this administration, there is a better way. To the Premier: has cabinet approved this sale?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government's policy has always been, whether it's in the oil sands or whether it's in agriculture or any other industry, to balance the needs of economic growth, of increasing jobs in the province, balancing those needs in terms of landowner rights and also the environment. There's an application before the Minister of SRD. He is reviewing the application, and he will be able to provide the details in terms of the process of any sale of Crown lands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even if there isn't a legal obligation to consult with Albertans on the sale of their land, isn't there a moral obligation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a process that is followed in terms of accepting any application from any landowner in terms of the disposal of any Crown property, and that's land that's owned by the people of Alberta. As I said, there is a process, and we're following that process. The minister may have other details.

Dr. Swann: Well, can the Premier confirm that this land is being sold for pennies on the dollar?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the situation as it stands today is that we have a proposal – a proposal – from a group of individuals that want to take a look at an agricultural prospect in southern Alberta. The idea that we are selling, have sold, or are going to sell: pure speculation. What's happening here is that there are members opposite who are watching TV ads and reading newspapers and deciding that that's government action based on what they read. There is a proposal that we're dealing with. We're assessing it and will continue to do so.

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

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will table a letter from February of 2008 in which the Premier acknowledged that the province's emergency rooms were overcrowded. In it he promised to direct the then minister of health to establish an expert panel of emergency physicians to develop a plan to address this situation. To the Premier: why didn't you live up to your commitment in forming an expert panel?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I know which letter the member is referring to because she was on the other side when she received the letter. The letter stipulates in terms of what government is committed to do; that is, to increase the number of spaces for training physicians, increase the number of spaces for training nurses in the province, increase the number of spaces for other health care professionals, and work with all in the system, including doctors and nurses, to ensure that we improve the performance, that we reduce waiting times, and improve access to health care in this province.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm on this side and not on that side.

Given that the Premier and the minister of health spent a lot of time talking about putting patients first, why has it taken so long for the Premier to keep his two-and-a-half-year-old promise to create this critically needed expert panel and, for that matter, plan?

2:10

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has consulted with physicians. He has consulted with physicians not only in terms of bone and joint surgery but also eye surgery and has consulted with emergency room physicians as well. They are part of putting a plan forward in terms of reducing the access time. At the end of the day we do have to train more physicians in Alberta, train more doctors, and we are well under way on that plan.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've seen what's happened with the bone and joint, and we've also seen what's happened with the eye care.

My final question is to the Premier. Given that emergency room overcrowding has now reached a critical breaking point – and I'm not asking for more money, Mr. Premier – will the Premier redirect funding from what should be lower priority initiatives such as your provincial branding, which no one can remember, in order to address this situation immediately?

Mr. Stelmach: In fact, we already have. We never spent all the money that was put into the branding initiative. We never did spend that money. That money will always move to the highest priority within the operation of government. I believe that there's about \$10 million or \$12 million that was not spent on the branding initiative.

On the other hand, it's bigger than just trying to find some quick, easy solution. Some of it is long term in terms of more doctors and more beds. The other is in training. It's constantly looking to other ways of providing that care. I'm proud to say that the physicians in this province have got together with other allied health care providers, and we're up to now 32 primary care networks. That's a step in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For two and a half years this government has known that there is a dangerous crisis in health care, and it has been hiding this from Albertans. In February 2008 the Premier promised emergency department doctors that his government would take action to end the crisis in emergency rooms. Two and a half years have passed, and people have continued to suffer and even die in emergency rooms, yet this Premier has done nothing. Will the Premier admit the obvious, that he has failed utterly to protect Albertans when they need help the most?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've seen improvements in many areas of the system: 3,000 additional surgeries just done here recently. We are moving positively, progressively on the emergency room access. Part of the difficulty there, of course, is to find spaces for the seniors who require continuing care. We've added considerably more beds there, but we have to do more, and we're continuing to do more. That's why I thank all of the groups like Bethany and Good Sam that have come together, Covenant Health, partnering with government to provide more spaces in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the shortage of long-term care beds is a major reason for backed-up emergency rooms and given that the Premier promised 600 more long-term care beds in the last election and given that the government has since been steadily reducing them instead, will the Premier admit to misleading voters in the last election about his government's intention for long-term care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, according to Alberta Health Services we will meet a target of something like 1,333 additional beds for seniors, so we're going to go far beyond what we thought we would be able to put in place in a short period of time.

The other thing. Rather than focusing on what the opposition wants to do – that is, traditional long-term care beds where we would split married couples after 50, 60 years because the system dictates it – Mr. Speaker, we're putting the senior first. We're putting the patient first, not what the opposition wants.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier continues to throw sand in the faces of Albertans about his real plans for long-term care beds, which are medical beds and which are necessary in order to clear up the backlog in emergency rooms, will he come clean with the Assembly, come clean with Albertans, and admit that he's reducing long-term care beds and he's part of the problem as far as increasing the waiting times in our emergency rooms? You're the problem.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that most Albertans disagree with what the opposition member has said. Our plan here is to build continuing care beds. As the need of the senior increases – meaning that maybe they lose more mobility, maybe a bit more dementia, or maybe that more health care is required for that particular senior – we can add the additional services to the room. Why keep moving the senior from a traditional lodge setting to an auxiliary hospital or a nursing home, keep moving them around, when you could add the services to the very same space that they have? To me that makes very good common sense.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Long-term Care Facility Closures

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are several guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees in the gallery extremely alarmed at what's happening to long-term care in Red Deer, as many of us are. Alberta Health Services' annual report shows that there are 252 people waiting for both acute care in the community and continuing care in the region, yet this government is closing 200 public long-term care beds in the Red Deer area. There's a better way. To the minister of health: is it not a mistake to be closing 200 public long-term care beds when there are 252 people waiting for them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I recall being in Red Deer for that opening with the minister of seniors. There's a brand new, state-of-the-art facility there. The people who are already in it say that it is just incredible. That's Extencare Michener Hill. It's 280 brand new beds, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition should know that 220 of those are, in fact, long-term care beds.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the whole plan is a mistake? It's clear that only 60 per cent of the staffing needed for that long-term care setting is in place. What does he say about that?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the recruitment process is very thorough. It requires people to apply. It requires them to be interviewed. In a few cases it may even require them to be trained or upgraded in their training. It will vary. What I would like the hon. member and all Albertans to know, especially members in this House, is that in that brand new Extencare facility 65 additional net new added capacity beds were also put in.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, he is defusing the problem and avoiding the question, which is really, fundamentally: will the minister immediately order that the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor remain open and provide the necessary beds there?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer nursing home is one of our service facilities that has served Albertans extremely well, but it is aged. When the decision was made, it was looked at from the standpoint of whether or not it was more economical and better for Albertans to put money toward upgrading or to building new. The decision was made, clearly, to build new and to expand capacity at the same time.

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

Relief for Emergency Wait Times

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been dire concerns about emergency room wait times in Alberta's hospitals for some time. Reports say that patients are waiting up to 5, 10, 12 hours in ERs. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to address this problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, a number of things are being done. I think the first and most important thing is actioning the five-year funding commitment, the first of its kind, which this government brought in a few months ago. Secondly, we do have a four-point plan, that I alluded to earlier, which includes looking at a new discharge protocol. It looks at more beds, obviously. It looks at increasing and expanding services for Health Link and also addressing additional monies that are needed for home-care services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister: can the minister be specific about what is being done in Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in my meeting at 8 o'clock this morning at the University of Alberta hospital, where I dropped in unannounced to see how things were going in emergency, I can tell you that they told me that there are 18 more transition beds, which are part of the emergency bed and acute-care bed protocol, that are being opened up as we speak. In fact, four of them are operational, fully functioning, today. Another nine will open on Monday, Mr. Speaker, and the remaining few will be open by mid-November. And that's just one example.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Health needs can be very unpredictable. How can a discharge date be set for a patient upon their admittance to an ER?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is part of Alberta Health Services' multipronged approach to addressing ER pressures is not only to take a serious look at how patients are admitted but also to provide them with a plan on when they can go home. That's welcome news for everybody. What they've said is: let's take a look at this and talk with the family, talk with the patient

and say that on this-and-this date you can expect to be discharged, assuming your condition warrants it. What they've added to that is to say: let's try to get it done by 11 a.m. to free up that space for others who might need it.

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

2:20 Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use
(continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks we have heard outrage from across Alberta regarding the sale of Crown lands for a potato farm. Instead of protecting Albertans' land, this government is selling it without public consultation. A moratorium on the sale of public lands would be a better way until debate can take place. To the minister of agriculture: is it true that Alberta Agriculture has concerns about this sale and that assessment for irrigation suitability has not been completed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department has stayed in close contact with sustainable resources. This is a proposal that's being looked at by that ministry, and they can comment on that. We want agricultural land to be used for its best and highest use to the benefit of all Albertans, and I'm sure that will be the guiding principles that that department uses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is the minister's response to Albertans who have referred to this deal as a breach of public trust?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, firstly, let's be clear that what we have in front of us is a proposal, as I had indicated earlier. This is a proposal. We have not sold anything. There is no sale agreement, no documents that would indicate that, and the idea that somehow or another there's been no consultation, no discussion ongoing with respect to this issue is false. I have met with county councillors, county reeves, the representatives from the grazing association that's involved in this thing over the last six months. There's nothing secret about this. We do not hold public consultation currently in the province of Alberta to sell land for agricultural purposes. It's served us well for a hundred years. A third and more of this province has been put into agricultural service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. However, this is the 21st century, not a hundred years ago.

Again to the minister of sustainable resources: given that other established ag operations in the region have been denied access to increased water allocation, where will this potato farmer get his water and at what cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't give those details because I'm not privy to the information or the contracts that he may or may not have made. However, part of the

proposal that's come forward is to develop about an 800-acre lake and wetland on this real estate. God Himself may provide the water. I don't know.

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

Relief for Emergency Wait Times
(continued)

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many, including emergency room doctors, have told us that wait times in Alberta hospitals are reaching potentially crisis levels. They say that the main cause of this is a severe shortage of continuing care beds. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what are you doing to tackle this very important issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, among the strategies are things like opening more continuing care beds and also opening a lot more acute-care beds. Now, we've got approximately 800 new beds that have been opened for continuing care purposes since April of this year. That's a tremendous number of new beds, and that's welcome news to all Albertans. We do have the other protocols that I mentioned earlier with respect to discharge, with respect to home care, and with respect to the expansion of Alberta Health Link. There are a number of things happening like that, and tomorrow night when I meet with the head of emergency services, I expect I'll hear a few more ideas from him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a proud Calgary MLA may I ask the minister what he's doing to deal with this situation specifically in Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, specific to Calgary there's a combination of things happening to help deliver over 100 additional beds there. This is a combination of different types of beds – let's be clear – some of which have been alluded to or referred to in previous announcements and a lot of which are brand new added capacity. That includes more hospice beds, more acute-care beds, more subacute beds, more transition beds, and more continuing care beds. There's a lot that's going on right in Calgary as we speak, and there's more coming.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, specific to Calgary, Minister, what are you doing to relieve pressure on the continuing care system around Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the big pressures being faced in emergency, as we know, is acute-care beds that are occupied by people who ought to be, should be, or could be in a continuing care setting. So in addition to building more continuing care beds, we're also looking at other overcrowding protocols. Some of that would require people to be moved from the emergency area up to an acute-care level, taking a look at which ones are in more serious condition, which ones can stay on stretchers, which ones need the beds. That particular protocol is very active here in Edmonton as well as in Calgary.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The airport tunnel continues to be an important issue for Calgary. The Alberta government's failure to assist with the tunnel will strand commuters in Calgary, increase congestion on Deerfoot Trail, and harm the businesses in the area. With the current administration refusing to seriously consider supporting the Calgary airport tunnel, the city faces a difficult choice of forgoing other infrastructure projects or going without the tunnel. There must be a better way. To the Minister of Transportation: Calgarians strongly support this project, so why has the minister not supported the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this government supports all municipal infrastructure to the best we possibly can. In fact, Calgary alone this year will get around a half a billion dollars in grants to be able to work on their priority infrastructure projects. I'm sure that we are all here to help support them with that, but we have to follow our processes. We have to do what we're responsible for, and we have to let the municipalities do what they're responsible for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the minister had the will, the airport tunnel could get off the ground.

Given that Deerfoot Trail is already over capacity, will the minister finally acknowledge the importance of this project and support the city of Calgary in getting the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just have to keep repeating myself to this hon. member and keep telling him that we're here supporting things. Deerfoot Trail doesn't go on to the tunnel. The tunnel comes from the other side of the airport. I'm sure that this hon. member wants to get it done, and so do we, but he has to deal with his municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the minister unable to effectively lobby the federal government to support the need for the Calgary airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I lobby the federal government all the time trying to get support for all of our big projects in Alberta.

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

ID Cards for Homeless People

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government recently announced a program to help homeless Albertans obtain government-issued identification. While this is, no doubt, a great photo op for the government, some question the logic behind the program. My first question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Even though we're in an era of fiscal restraint, how can this minister rationalize making homeless people, those who are most in need, pay for the ID card?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to this question. This member had asked, realistically, about why we are charging this \$12. Well, first off, assistance is available on an individual basis from Alberta Works for individuals who

cannot afford the \$12 fee. There are two reasons, though, that we went with the \$12 fee, one being that there is an intrinsic value to identification, and secondly, for those who are able to afford it, that's roughly the break-even cost to the taxpayer. We wanted to be compassionate both to the homeless individual but also to the taxpayer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Many homeless Albertans are living high-risk lifestyles and cannot properly maintain their own independence. How can this minister reasonably assure Albertans that this program will not create more identification fraud and violate the personal security of these already vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta ID cards are among the most secure documents of their type in North America. This program will not change that. These ID cards are the same ID cards that all Albertans can apply for as well. It's about enabling these individuals to have access to ID and to make sure that if they want to store it, they can store it. It will not jeopardize the information and security of the current ID card that we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Using identification cards to track the homeless seems a bit Orwellian to me, but it just seems to be fine to this particular minister. How can the minister assure this House that tracking the homeless is in line with the privacy laws of Alberta, particularly if the card identifies the person as homeless?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question, but I can tell you that there is no intention to follow or track homeless people through this identification card program. It does provide Alberta identification cards to individuals, the same as individuals would get if they did not have drivers' licences. On top of that, this is strictly a voluntary program. It's designed to recognize that it can be difficult to get on your feet without identification.

Over the next few months I'm really looking forward to stories from the hundreds of Albertans who I anticipate are going to sign up for this program and will be able to go to banks, sign up, and get bank accounts. And when they're working, they can cash their cheques there as opposed to going through a cheque-cashing place and paying fees through the system.

I'm very proud of this program, Mr. Speaker, and I think every member of this Assembly should be.

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

Standards for Addiction Treatment Centres

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At least a hundred and twenty thousand Albertans suffer from addictions, but we have treatment beds for less than 1 per cent of those Albertans, and the ones we do have are unregulated, unmonitored, and not even accredited. Given that a public inquiry concluded last week that 17-year-old Taylor

Argent's death at a treatment centre was associated with a profound absence of professional standards, will the minister today issue an apology to the Argent family and commit to implementing minimum standards in these addiction treatment centres across the province immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I assume she's referring to a private facility just outside of Red Deer or Lacombe, in which case that is not under my direct sphere of responsibility, but I am concerned about all Albertans, and I am deeply saddened by the tragic death of this person referred to.

However, accreditations and standards and so on are being reviewed right now for public facilities, and perhaps as part of that we can also look at how we can work more closely with the private facilities, who probably have accreditation or licensing or some sort of an agreement, perhaps through United States standards.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Taylor Argent was referred to the CARC by staff at Alberta Health Services, and as of last week this centre was still advertised on the Alberta Health Services website, as were many other unaccredited centres, both private and public. Why won't the minister take responsibility for his government's role in this tragic incident and demand some transparent accountability before the safety of even more Alberta teens and adults suffers or they are put at risk?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when you go to a doctor, it's my understanding from having spoken with literally hundreds of them, most of them one on one, that the doctor's obligation is to make you aware of every possible treatment, whether it's covered and funded publicly or not. That is what they must do. That was the circumstance that we had with Avastin, for example.

Now, in this case I'm sure Alberta Health Services folks, whoever they are, were acting in the best interests of the people who were asking the questions: "Where can we get some treatment? Where can we get in the quickest? What kind of services are available?" I'm sure they acted in the best faith to help that family at a time of great need.

Ms Notley: Indeed, they probably acted assuming, like most Albertans do, that the government actually monitors people who provide health services.

Since we have treatment beds for less than 1 per cent of those who are addicted in Alberta and since ER doctors have told this government that there's a serious crisis in ER caused in part by people with addictions and mental health issues, why won't the health minister fund an adequate number of regulated addictions beds so these Albertans can stay out of the ER and get the help that they need?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this government spends \$600 million, approximately, every year helping people with mental health circumstances, a lot of them due to addictions. We are also responding with a mental health strategy, a province-wide strategy. As part of that, the accreditation protocols, the licensing protocols will be reviewed starting with the public facilities that are under our purview, and we'll look at other possibilities as well. By the end of spring we'll have it all sorted out, with a new strategy that people will surely embrace.

First Point of Contact for Special-needs Children

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, the system for recognizing and supporting special-needs children in this province is not working. There is,

however, a better way through stronger ministerial co-operation, which would involve the first ministry contacted overseeing the provision of services to ensure that the needs of children and their families are met. To the Minister of Education: with coding on the way out how will the minister guarantee that special-needs children are identified and provided with the supports they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be my hope that we consider each and every one of our children and youth in this province special and that we would understand, when they come to school, that all of them have learning needs and that many of them have barriers to success that need to be overcome.

When we talk about getting rid of coding as a funding mechanism, it doesn't mean we would get rid of assessment of those needs and the ability to provide educational and other support programs for students as they need them to improve and help them with their learning process. It's not about coding a child to pigeonhole them and to provide funding; it's about understanding the learning needs of the child and providing the resources needed to achieve that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: for vulnerable special-needs children in the province's care will the minister accept full responsibility for every child whose first point of contact is her department?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question because I know this member cares very much about this area of special-needs children in schools. This member was at that news conference. I can tell you that I am working closely with the Minister of Education and the minister of health along with Justice as well regarding it, just across ministries that relate to special-needs children and first point of entry. There's not a definitive answer to give you today, but it's very much in the works.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the minister of health: given that special-needs children are often first diagnosed by a physician or a psychologist, will the minister accept full responsibility for every child whose first point of contact is his department?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about all Albertans regardless of their age, regardless of any other circumstances. If the member has a particular case that he feels hasn't been attended to, I would ask him to bring it to our attention. Otherwise, I was just talking about mental health needs, for example, and I can tell you that out of that \$600 million we provide an additional \$50 million just to help young people with mental health situations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Water Quality of Athabasca River

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months concern has been raised over Alberta's monitoring of the water in the Athabasca River. Albertans deserve to have a clear understanding of oil sands development. My question is to the Minister of

Environment. My constituents understood that there had been a very thorough water monitoring of the river for decades. Can the minister tell us what kind of monitoring has been done and by whom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right. We have in fact been monitoring this river since the 1970s, we being government and our partners in monitoring. That monitoring includes the Alberta Environment long-term river networking program, the regional aquatics monitoring program, or RAMP, and recently we've initiated a containment load study to address any impact of emissions from land and water as well as the ecosystem on human health development. The bottom line is that we are constantly seeking the best information possible so that we can make appropriate decisions to protect this river and others in Alberta.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we've been criticized for the discrepancies between our water monitoring data and those of other scientists. Can the minister tell us why there are discrepancies and what governments are doing to address these discrepancies?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to an incident, a report this summer that indicated that there were conflicting opinions with respect to interpretation of data. The Premier indicated at that time that he was confused. Frankly, I'm confused, and I expect Albertans are confused. The Premier instructed me, and I have since formed a third-party committee of scientists, some of whom were recommended by Dr. Schindler and others by Alberta Environment, just to answer that very question.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we know that the federal government has also created its own review panel to look at water monitoring in the oil sands. Can the minister tell us if the government is actually being redundant in the panel that we've got here and if we're wasting resources by forming a provincial review committee that's doing the same thing as the federal government?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are committed to using the best information possible. My understanding is that the federal panel will be looking specifically at RAMP and at the monitoring system. The panel that I asked be put in place is to have a look at the 30 to 40 years of data and help us to understand why there's a difference in interpreting that data. At the end of the day both of those groups will come together and, I'm sure, be making some strong recommendations on how we can improve not only our data gathering but our interpretation of that data.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:40 Emergency Medical Services
(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on *The Rutherford Show* the minister of health said that he had visited 23 emergency rooms across Alberta since becoming the minister of health, in order to talk with doctors, nurses, front-line staff to understand the needs of the province's emergency facilities. The next day he responded to a letter from Dr. Parks on the emergency room crisis, saying that the dire situation was a new revelation to him. To the minister of health: did you really visit 23 emergency rooms and see no evidence of the escalating crisis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is taking a little licence with what I said back to Dr. Parks, but I'll let that one go.

The fact is that I have visited these emergency departments – I visited another four or five on the weekend – and I'll continue doing that because I'm of the opinion that the way an emergency department ticks or doesn't tick gives you a snapshot of how the whole hospital works, and that's a fact. I've gone out and met with these folks – I'm meeting with some more tomorrow – and we're making improvements as we go. It doesn't fix itself overnight, as we all know, but fixes are in the works. A lot of it has already occurred, and more of it is coming.

Mr. Hinman: No. It's been two and a half years, Mr. Speaker, that they've been aware it, but they've done very little.

Given that it is now painfully clear that the Alberta Health superboard experiment has been a complete failure, will the minister agree to disband the superboard and decentralize the administration of our hospitals and return it to the local communities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are many advantages to having one centralized board, not the least of which, of course, is a more efficient system of delivery that is saving hundreds of millions of dollars, which we can put right back into health services on the front lines, which is where it is needed. There are no plans to disband this board. They've worked hard under very difficult circumstances. They now have a golden opportunity, with a five-year funding plan to work with, which is infinitely different than the \$1.3 billion deficit they were looking at last year.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly questionable. Given that Dr. Grant Innes, the superboard's own head of emergency medicine for Calgary hospitals, said last week that it's the worst that it's ever been, how can this minister defend and keep the superboard in place? It's compounding the problem. It's about procurement and letting people out early. We don't need a superboard that says one size fits all. They need to address it at the local level.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's one reason we brought in a five-year funding plan with a 6 per cent assurance in the first year and in each of the next years, unlike what the Wildrose put out the day after our budget, saying that they would only offer 3.5 per cent. You show me where you're going to cut 2.5 per cent out, as your press release said, and then, hon. member, we'll talk. Okay?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Trade Dispute on Vegetable Oil Products

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province recently won a long-standing trade dispute with Ontario over policies that have restricted Alberta's vegetable oil producers and refiners from selling in Ontario. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Could you provide details about why Alberta filed a trade dispute over this matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been very frustrating to have these interprovincial trade disputes that have mitigated against producers in Alberta marketing their product. Canola, for example, could not be shipped to Ontario and then put in through any other

dairy-blend processing in Ontario. Ontario put up a barrier. In March of this year we took another stab at getting the government of Ontario to see whether or not they'd change their minds. They didn't, so we presented to the agreement on internal trade panel. They ruled in Alberta's favour, and as of February 1, 2011, it will be imperative that Ontario follow through.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. My first supplemental is: being that we had already filed this same dispute and we hadn't won it, why did we have to file it again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason was, according to the panel process, that without an enforceable regulation attached to their strategies and their outcome deliverables, we weren't able to actually enforce any of their decisions. Now an enforcement provision has been added, similar to the TILMA provision for dispute reconciliation, and because it is part of this agreement – it's integral with the agreement – Ontario must comply. If they don't, they will be subject to fines of up to \$5 million to actually address the matter. We are very hopeful this time that with all of the i's dotted and t's crossed and with the agreement of other provincial Premiers, we will get support from Ontario.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the minister of agriculture. How does this announcement benefit Alberta agricultural companies as well as producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canola represents about 17 per cent of our ag exports out of Alberta. It's a hugely important part of our agriculture industry. It totalled about \$1.3 billion last year, and it's hugely important that we're in the domestic markets, too. This will be of great advantage to our producers, to have access again to the Ontario market.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, every time the Minister of Justice tries to justify her changes to legal aid, the answer seems increasingly confused. Members of the Law Society of Alberta have mobilized against the draconian cuts in provincial funding to Legal Aid Alberta. What was the point of this pilot project? To restrict access to justice for Alberta's most vulnerable people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two and a half years ago we as the Department of Justice, one of three parties to a legal aid agreement with the Law Society and the Legal Aid board, decided that we needed to provide Albertans with more than one model for legal aid. Therefore, we launched a principle-based approach to change delivery of legal aid in this province so that there were a diverse number of services available to people, including advice through law information centres, community law clinics, family law clinics, and in some cases certificates.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 12 the media reported that you stated, "I want to make it very clear that if there is a person who is in criminal court, who is charged and needs representation, legal aid funds that." Do you stand by that statement?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in that interview there were a number of points made by the reporter. One of those points was that people were being wrongfully convicted in this province. The first thing I said to that reporter was that I challenge him to provide me information because that would certainly be something that I was concerned about. We know that we have a constitutional obligation to provide legal defence to people who appear in criminal court in this province, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear that we understand our constitutional duties because the Provincial Court recently stated that changes to legal aid are forcing defendants to "look elsewhere for assistance." Wouldn't that mean that we're falling down on our constitutional obligations?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it appears to me that before we start attributing quotes to people, we might want to make sure we know exactly where they're coming from. I will tell you that in conversations we've had with the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench, the position of the government of Alberta has been very clear. The courts understand fully that we are meeting our obligations. The courts understand that it is important to provide legal services to people who are charged with criminal offences in a number of forums. For many years we have had youth criminal defence offices and duty counsel in this province, that provide people with legal advice when they are charged to appear in criminal court, and we'll continue to do so.

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

Funding for Training

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. There are thousands of students in Alberta who are still waiting to find out if they are approved for funding for training even though these classes started some two months ago. My question to the minister: why are these students still waiting for their money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, a very unfortunate situation, a situation that in part resulted as the computer system simply failed, a new computer system put in place to process these applications. Ironically, it was designed to serve these clients better, and as technology does from time to time, it has failed. However, this department has responded immediately by hiring additional staff, by appropriating staff from other departments, and they have been literally manually processing applications seven days a week.

Mr. Speaker, any application . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I really appreciate these technical challenges, but my question again is: what

do you say to the single mother who needs to feed her children but has yet to receive the funding and your ministry says that the funding is coming? What is she supposed to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to finish my initial answer, every application filed before September 27 now has been processed, and overall we have received over 7,600 applications. That mother who is in dire straits simply has to come to one of our 59 offices throughout the province, and if indeed in financial crisis, we will be issuing emergency benefits forthwith. We have issued over 500 emergency benefits to date, and we will continue to issue them as situations demand.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Minister, I certainly appreciate these measures that you're taking, but how can you assure Albertans that this situation will not happen again?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's put it this way. This particular department issues somewhere between 50,000 to 60,000 cheques every month – every month – and you never hear about any problems arising. From time to time technology will fail, and if it does, we do have emergency procedures in place to supplement technological failure. I cannot give such an assurance because no one can give you an assurance that technology will not fail in the future. But I can assure you of one thing. There are processes in place that if technology were to fail in the future, we will be able to respond to it adequately and make sure that no one is in financial dire straits.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Eighteen members were recognized. There were 108 questions and responses.

Before the Clerk calls Members' Statements, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you a group of individuals from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and the Alberta Council on Aging. They've come here today to witness the tabling of petitions concerning the closing of Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor, two publicly funded and delivered seniors' care facilities in Red Deer, plus staff shortages at Extendicare Michener Hill. I will ask them to rise as I mention their names: Tammy Graham, AUPE chair; Angela MacArthur, AUPE chair; Wendy Kicia, AUPE chair; Ray Tweedle, AUPE chair; Sam Denhaan, president of Central Alberta Council on Aging; Margie Lunt, board member, Alberta Council on Aging; Doug Janssen, director of the Alberta Council on Aging; and Jules Noel, AUPE provincial executive. Let's give them all a round of applause for 3,575 signatures on the petition.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests who are here today as well because they are concerned

about the closure of seniors' facilities in Red Deer. I ask them to rise as I say their names. They are Jerine Johnson, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees local 44 council representative and Valley Park Manor employee for 37 years; Jaime Urbina, AUPE local 44 council rep, former Red Deer nursing home staff, and now employed at Valley Park Manor; David Eggen, executive director of Friends of Medicare; Brenda Corney, chair of the Red Deer chapter of Friends of Medicare; Ken Collier, chair of the Red Deer chapter of the Council of Canadians; Bev Hanes, treasurer and board member of the Central Alberta Council on Aging; David Climenhaga, communications director of AUPE; and Tyler Bedford, communications officer with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. They've come to the Legislature to see the tabling of the AUPE petition to save the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor. My guests are seated in both the public and members' galleries. I'd now ask the Assembly to provide them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there really is no need to introduce the same party twice or three times in the one question period.

We have standing orders, and at 3 o'clock Standing Order 7(7) is due to kick in. It says, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." There is no way that this Routine will be concluded in less than perhaps 30 minutes from now, so I prefer to speed the process up. Rather than asking a member to move unanimous consent to go beyond 3 o'clock to conclude the Routine, I will just ask the question: is any member opposed to us not seeing 3 o'clock when we arrive at 3 o'clock and that we continue to the conclusion of the Routine? If you are opposed, say something.

Members' Statements

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

First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is privileged to be home to one of the largest and fastest growing aboriginal populations in the country. This government is committed to increasing the participation of First Nations people in the diverse economic opportunities our province offers.

On August 24 this year our efforts were nationally recognized by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. The First Nations economic partnerships initiative, or FNEPI, received a national bronze award for innovative program management and generating positive outcomes in aboriginal economic development. FNEPI is the first program of its kind in Canada. It is delivered by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations in partnership with Alberta Employment and Immigration to develop sustainable partnerships among First Nations, industry, and government.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen some really great successes. This initiative helped produce 100 partnership projects, and some of the successes include the Paul First Nation securing a \$1.5 million electrical utilities contract; a trucking company in Hobbema with lucrative contracts thanks to strong ties between industry and First Nations; school camps where aboriginal children learn about careers in science and technology; and a partnership that will help First Nations in central Alberta tap into contracting opportunities in oil and gas.

Many of these success stories share some of the following commonalities: building long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships; leveraging existing networks; creating new business opportunities; and creating jobs and developing entrepreneurs. These are crucial elements in growing our province's competitiveness, and we know

that a quarter of a million aboriginal people living in this province play an important role in this growth.

Recognition by IPAC is an honour and allows us to further share this successful partnership model with our public administration peers across the country. I congratulate the two ministries.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As if we needed more evidence that the Tories are no longer fit to govern, along comes Potatogate, the backroom deal to sell pristine, irreplaceable Crown land near Medicine Hat for a mere \$75 per acre to friends, the kind of practice that has sadly become commonplace in this administration. For a song this Premier is going to allow the destruction of 16,000 acres of irreplaceable wildlife habitat, home to 70 per cent of Alberta's at-risk species. In return Alberta will see a privately owned commercial potato patch, a water-intensive crop where water is already fully allocated, in one of the most drought-prone regions of the province.

Once this sale goes through, the people of Alberta won't be able to control how the land is used even though the government has not yet completed its regional land-use plan for the area. It's mind boggling, but this short-sighted administration is eager to sell off public lands even before they've figured out the most effective use for these lands or the critical water issues that are already limiting other developments. Why are they even bothering to develop a land-use strategy if they're determined to pull stunts like this?

There's a better way. For years Alberta Liberals have demanded an immediate halt to the sale of public lands. Since this government won't do that, they should at least establish a transparent and honest process to determine how public lands should be sold. Only after the people of the region ratify a land-use plan would an Alberta Liberal government even consider allowing new commercial or industrial developments in the area.

Mr. Speaker, we demand that the Premier halt the sale of this grassland, establish a public consultation process for disposition of any such public land, strengthen provisions in the Public Lands Act to conserve prairie land, and enact legislation to protect environmentally significant native grasslands on public lands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Waste Reduction Week

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week marked the 10th year Albertans have celebrated Waste Reduction Week. Canadians from across the country took part in activities to help reduce waste and keep it out of landfills. Fortunately, many Albertans took up the challenge, including a large number of grade 4 students. Participating classes registered and conducted a five-day waste audit in the classroom and pledged to reduce waste in their classes for the rest of the year. During the week I had the privilege of visiting classrooms across Alberta, and I found the students' knowledge and enthusiasm for reducing waste truly refreshing. I came away from the visits confident that the next generation is ready and willing to do its part to reduce waste.

Of course, just because the week is over doesn't mean we should stop thinking about waste reduction in our homes and workplaces. There are many easy and practical things we can all do. Albertans should choose products with little or no packaging, buy in bulk, consider items that are durable, and practise the three Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle to help to lessen waste in our province. Instead

of throwing unwanted household items and used clothing in the garbage, donate the goods to community organizations.

I encourage everyone to take a close look at how they can reduce waste throughout the year. The choices you make, big or small, really do make an impact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

3:00 National Child Abuse Awareness Month

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, it's often important to reflect on that which causes so much pain in our society. Unfortunately, I would ask us all to reflect on the fact that much of the pain in our world is caused by one human being hurting another, one human being purposely performing acts of either abuse or neglect that hurt another human being.

October is National Child Abuse Awareness Month. Nothing is more frightening than knowing that some children are at risk of abuse by those in positions of authority, those meant to protect them, those that we've entrusted with our most precious. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play. Everyone involved in a child's life shares in the responsibility to report any suspicions they have about potential abuse or neglect.

Every day concerned Albertans do this; they act on this responsibility and call the confidential child abuse hotline. Mr. Speaker, each of these calls represents a child or youth who may have been harmed, or his family may need help in dealing with or coping with some of the challenges they may be facing. Each of these calls has been critical in ensuring that children and youth are protected and kept safe. I would say that some of these calls could potentially have saved someone's life.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to continue to be vigilant, report abuse or neglect, and help support families to create positive, nurturing environments for youth and children.

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

Dr. Gary McPherson

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I rise today to pay tribute to a great Albertan, Dr. Gary McPherson, who passed away earlier this year. If you knew Dr. McPherson, you are well aware of the influence this man had on the disability community in Alberta. Although Dr. McPherson had a permanent disability, and some might say it was because of that disability, he was a tireless advocate on behalf of people with disabilities.

Dr. McPherson's efforts on behalf of Albertans with disabilities began over two decades ago. In 1988 he was instrumental in the creation of the Premier's council, and he served as chair of that council for 10 years. His ideals of equality and citizenship for all people still influence council activities. Dr. McPherson was so influential that following his retirement as chair, they named the council's first citizen recognition award after him. This award is presented annually to an Albertan who demonstrates outstanding leadership in enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities.

Dr. McPherson was also a writer, a public speaker, a professor and an adviser at the University of Alberta, and president and chairman of the Steadward Centre, a health, fitness, lifestyle, and research facility serving people with disabilities. His achievements didn't stop there, however. For example, he was also inducted into both the Edmonton and the Alberta sports halls of fame.

It's fitting that we continue to honour him even after his passing. At a memorial for Dr. McPherson last June our Premier announced

a scholarship in his name as a way to commemorate his lifelong dedication as a leader, advocate, and role model. I hope that as a province we will carry on honouring Dr. McPherson and his legacy by continuing the work he began.

Thank you.

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

National School Library Day

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, October 25, marks the eighth annual National School Library Day. Across the province school library staff will be celebrating excellence in school library programs, hosting guest speakers, and linking up with community organizations to highlight the vital role of school libraries in the lives of our students. I think everybody in this House has a fond memory of visiting their school library to choose their favourite book and that special pride that we took in being able to take that book home and share it with our family and friends.

Mr. Speaker, October is also Canadian Library Month. I'm very pleased to rise today in honour of National School Library Day and Canadian Library Month and the many people who work tirelessly to support our libraries, including teachers, parents, principals, and community members. Alberta has benefited from the deep dedication of these people. Their dedication is matched by this government, which is committed to a strong, province-wide public library system.

Mr. Speaker, today's recognition also gives me the opportunity to talk about two important considerations when thinking about the future of our school and public libraries. First, in these times of fiscal restraint it is imperative that we make the most of our financial resources. We need to continue to look for ways in which our public libraries can partner with our school libraries. By doing so, we can make more efficient use of our resources and provide better access to both students and the public.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, libraries of today and the future should look much different than libraries of the past. Technology has significantly changed our society and our way of life, and libraries are no exception. Our libraries must recognize and adapt to these changes in order to sustain their importance and relevance in today's and tomorrow's world.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the Canadian Association for School Libraries and the Alberta School Library Council for their hard work in promoting awareness of the importance of libraries in our schools and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Small Business Week

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, October 17 to 23, was Small Business Week, which, as we all know, means celebrating the successes and contributions of small and medium-sized businesses all across Canada. Here in Alberta Business Link and the Chambers of Commerce held events across the province that saw businesspeople come together to learn, to network, and to socialize in the company of their peers. In pursuing their dreams, entrepreneurs and small-business owners show a great deal of courage and resilience, and their success benefits us all through jobs, economic activity, and, yes, tax revenues so that we can provide services to Albertans.

I'm pleased to be able to say that this innovative entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes small business is alive and well here in Alberta. With just over 10 per cent of Canada's population, Mr.

Speaker, Alberta is home to about 14 per cent of all of the small businesses in Canada. Small businesses, those employing fewer than 50 people, account for 95.7 per cent of all businesses with employees in Alberta. That's over 150,000 businesses. The small-business sector is also a vital contributor to our provincial economy. Alberta's small-business sector was responsible for 31 per cent, almost a full third, of Alberta's gross domestic product in 2008.

Finally, while a vibrant small-business sector is important to the economic health of every single community in this province, it is much more than that. Small business and small-business owners help build their communities right at the grassroots level, Mr. Speaker. They are very much a part of the communities where they operate, and they make themselves known beyond the bottom line and beyond the balance sheet. They sponsor kids' hockey teams. They donate to local charities and community drives and serve on school boards as well as many other community groups. Our communities are more vibrant and inviting thanks to their contributions.

On behalf of my colleagues, this Assembly, and Albertans in general thank you to small business for all that you do for Alberta.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on – and it's been a few months since we've been here – three members in their members' statements today highlighted a week or a day. I'd like to now bring you up to date about October so that all members will be able to say that we have recognized these events in our Assembly, and nobody will come under criticism for failing to recognize one or the other.

October is Autism Awareness Month, Brain Tumour Awareness Month, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Canadian Library Month, Car Safety Month, Child Abuse Awareness Month, Community Living Awareness Month, Denturist Awareness Month, Eye Health Canada Month, Healthy Workplace Month, Influenza Immunization Awareness Month, International School Library Month, International Walk to School Month, Islamic History Month, Learning Disabilities Awareness Month, Lupus Awareness Month, National Occupational Therapy Month, Psoriasis Awareness Month, Renovation Month, Stamp Collecting Month, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month, Women's History Month.

Now, October 1 was International Day of Older Persons, as it was International Music Day, as it was World Smile Day, as it was World Vegetarian Day. October 2 was International Day of Non-Violence. October 3 to 9 was Animal Health Week, as it was Fire Prevention Week, as it was Mental Illness Awareness Week. October 4 was World Animal Day, as it was World Architecture Day, as it was World Habitat Day. October 4 to 8 was International Walk to School Week. October 4 to 10 was National Family Week, World Animal Week, World Space Week. October 5 was World Teachers' Day. October 6 was International Walk to School Day. October 8 to December 31 is the Christmas Seal Campaign launch. October 9 was the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, as it was World Post Day. October 10 was World Day against the Death Penalty, as it was World Mental Health Day.

3:10

October 10 to 15 was YMCA Week without Violence. October 11 was National Coming Out Day, as it was Thanksgiving Day. October 12 was World Arthritis Day. October 13 was International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction. October 14 was World Sight Day, as it was World Standards Day. October 15 was Global Handwashing Day, as it was International Day of Rural Women, as it was International White Cane Day. October 15 to 24 was National

Science and Technology Week. October 16 was World Food Day. October 16 to 22 was Protect the Human Week. October 17 was International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

October 17 to 23 was National Foster Family Week, as it was Co-op Week, as it was National School Safety Week, as it was Small Business Week. October 18 was Persons Day. October 18 was also World Menopause Day. October 18 to 22 was National Infection Control Week, as it was School Bus Safety Week, as it was Citizenship Week, as it was Waste Reduction Week. October 20 was National Microfinance Day, as it was World Osteoporosis Day, as it was World Statistics Day. October 22 was International Stuttering Awareness Day. October 24 was National Psoriasis Walk, as it was United Nations Day, as it was World Development Information Day.

October 24 to 30 is Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, as it is Disarmament Week, as it is National Block Parent Week. October 27 will be World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. October 29 will be World Psoriasis Day. October 31 will be Halloween, as it will be National UNICEF Day, as it will be World Thrift Day.

Next week we will move into November.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how impressed and thrilled I am to present a petition signed by 3,575 people from Red Deer and the surrounding area which is urging the government to "direct Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the closure of Valley Park Manor and the Red Deer Nursing Home." This is a lot of signatures. It's not easy to do that kind of work, and I really, really respect the people that did it.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have copies of the same petition, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly . . . to direct Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the closure of Valley Park Manor and the Red Deer Nursing Home.

This petition has 3,315 signatures.

Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 30 application.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I wish to inform the House that on completion of the daily Routine I will move to

adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the state of emergency medical services in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you also have a Standing Order 30 application?

Ms Blakeman: I do, sir. Thank you for recognizing me. According to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give oral notice that at the appropriate time, that is the conclusion of the Routine today, I would be raising the following issue under the Standing Order 30 provision:

Be it resolved that we adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the urgent matter of the sale of approximately 16,000

acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 18

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to introduce Bill 18 for first reading, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will bring monetary enforcement provisions to the agreement on internal trade and extend the existing provisions of TILMA to the New West Partnership trade agreement, that includes the province of Saskatchewan.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

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

Bill 19

Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to support implementation of the province's renewable fuels standard in 2011. Amendments will help ensure Alberta's renewable fuel producers are at a level playing field, for fuel tax purposes, with those outside the province of Alberta. Amendments will also allow information sharing between Alberta Finance and Enterprise and Alberta Energy to support efficient administration of both fuel tax and renewable fuel programs and allow for the reduction of reporting burden for the industry. Other minor technical changes are made to support the renewable fuel standard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 19 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 205

Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act.

The objective of this bill is to curb the theft of metal in Alberta by providing additional tools for law enforcement.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter written to Dr. Peter Kwan, president of emergency medicine with the Alberta Medical Association, from the Premier of Alberta regarding emergency service standards and access to health care.

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

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings here, and I have the appropriate number of copies of the following documents: a letter dated February 22, 2008, from Dr. Paul Parks on behalf of the emergency medicine physicians at the University of Alberta hospital to the minister of health, describing significant overcrowding in emergency departments; a letter to the Premier from Peter Kwan, that was just tabled by the previous member, so I won't table that; a letter dated July 3, 2008, from Dr. Paul Parks to the minister of health, warning of systemic overcrowding in emergency departments; and a letter dated September 30, 2010, from Dr. Paul Parks to the minister of health, describing severe systemic overcrowding in emergency departments. Attached to this letter are documents from 2010 and 2008 listing cases of suboptimal health outcomes compiled by triage physicians at the University of Alberta emergency department.

Thank you.

3:20

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood tabled the same thing, so we won't table it twice.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, and both of them are with permission. The first is a tabling from a constituent, Rick McEwen. Mr. McEwen is expressing his concern about the government's plan to close acute-care psychiatric beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The second tabling I have is an open letter to the president of the University of Alberta. It's from the Justice for Janitors campaign, which is in full swing over at the university. Hopefully, this letter will encourage the university to meet with the janitors directly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have several tablings as well. Pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 43rd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period of April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010.

As well, hon. members, I am tabling with the House today a copy of the projected sitting days calendar and members' statements routines for the months of October, November, December 2010.

As well, I'm tabling with the House today a copy of the Oral Question Period rotation routine, effective October 25, 2010.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, pursuant to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation 2009-2010 annual report and the Travel Alberta annual report 2009-2010.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2010 annual report, Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2009 annual report, ATB Financial 2010 annual report, and Alberta Investment Management Corporation annual report 2009-2010.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we get to the Standing Order 30 application, I indicated earlier I'd be making a brief comment with respect to question period and members' statements. This need be part of the record, and *Hansard* is the only record that we have, so this will be there for future reference.

Hon. members, the chair would like to advise members of some changes to the rotation of questions during Oral Question Period and the rotation of members' statements. These changes were agreed to by House leaders and the independent member after a consultation process that we undertook mid-summer. The chair provided the information concerning these changes in a memo to all members dated October 19, 2010. The changes were necessitated primarily by the move of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to a new caucus association. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo advised of this change in a letter dated generically August 2010 and received in the Speaker's office on September 7, 2010. The member's letter indicated that this change would be effective, and I quote, at the commencement of the fall sitting of the fall Legislature 2010, which is today, October 25, 2010, so as at 1:30 p.m. today that change came into effect.

The rotation of questions remains the same for what are days 1 and 3 in the four-day rotation as announced earlier in the year 2010. On day 2, which is what today is designated as, question 15 is no longer a position held by the Official Opposition but moves to the Wildrose Alliance. The 19th question will belong to the Official Opposition and not the members of the government caucus for today.

On day 4, which will be Wednesday, October 27, this week, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is no longer entitled to the sixth question as an independent member; he's now part of the Wildrose Alliance caucus. Accordingly, the designations for questions 7 through 14 advance one place. The 15th question on day 4 belongs to the Wildrose Alliance, the 16th question belongs to members of the government caucus, the 17th question belongs to the Official Opposition, and the 18th question and after belong to members of the government caucus.

For today, day 2 in the rotation, the Official Opposition was entitled to ask the first three questions; the Wildrose Alliance the fourth and 15th questions; the New Democrats the fifth and 12th questions; the Official Opposition the sixth, eighth, 10th, 13th, 17th, and 19th questions; the government members' caucus the seventh, ninth, 11th, 14th, 16th, 18th questions and after 19 questions.

For Members' Statements the position held by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as an independent member, every second Tuesday, will go to the Wildrose Alliance. Today saw government members entitled to six members' statements and the Official Opposition to one.

The House leaders have also requested that a member from the opposition be recognized each day for the second member's

statements. I would ask the three House leaders of the three opposition parties, who are in the House today, to try and determine who that person will be on a daily basis because the paper just provided to me says: you choose. Well, I would like to be more definitive than that, so you choose and advise my office by 12:30 p.m. each day who that person is, please.

The chair would like to emphasize that this order in questions and members' statements gives effect to the agreement reached by House leaders and the sole remaining independent member, and the chair provided the information concerning these changes in a memo to all members dated October 19, 2010.

Earlier in the proceedings the chair tabled copies of the Oral Question Period rotation effective October 25, 2010, and the projected sitting days calendar of the fall sitting as well as the schedule for Members' Statements.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please proceed with your petition under Standing Order 30.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 30(7)(a) states that motions under this Standing Order "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The section of emergency medicine of the Alberta Medical Association recently sent the minister of health a letter which indicated that emergency doctors are deeply concerned about what the letter called severe systemic overcrowding in emergency rooms in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, emergency room doctors are concerned that the overcrowding in emergency rooms is severe enough that patients are not receiving the care they need in sufficient time to prevent their condition from deteriorating. The letter to the minister says that overcrowding in our province today is worse than it has ever been, and front line emergency physicians continue to express grave concerns regarding their inability to provide safe or timely care to patients presenting to our Emergency Departments . . . we are routinely failing to meet even the basic recommended times to assess and treat acutely ill patients arriving to our hospitals.

The report goes on to say:

We feel compelled to continue to advocate on behalf of our patients, and recently members of our section have met with yourself, Deputy Minister Ramotar, as well as Dr. Duckett, in order to inform our healthcare leaders that Albertans continue to suffer and receive substandard emergency care as a direct result of a lack of capacity within the system. Again, our data and feedback from Emergency Physicians throughout the province indicate that our overcrowding problem continues to worsen and we anticipate the potential catastrophic collapse of timely emergency care delivery in the upcoming months. There must be an intervention immediately.

So says Dr. Parks.

Beauchesne's 390 states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency, meaning urgency of debate. That is "when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately."

Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that there is a government bill on the Order Paper titled the Alberta Health Act. The information that the government has released to us about the bill indicates that it does not address the crisis in emergency health services in the province. I know of nothing on the Order Paper that would allow this House an opportunity to address this issue. I believe that this is a most urgent matter which requires the full attention of the Assembly. We should

debate emergency department overcrowding today in this House so that the public can see where this Legislature stands on the matter and to advance possible solutions that will lead to better health outcomes for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my submission. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this. We're dealing with a Standing Order 30 application; we're not having the debate yet, okay? The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has articulately explained, Standing Order 30 as well as what is in *Beauchesne's* clearly indicates that in order for a matter like this to be debated, it must be of urgent importance. I just wanted to on behalf of my colleagues say that I don't think that we could honestly have a more urgent matter come before this House. Truly, we are dealing with a matter of life and death. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stated, Dr. Parks is very clear. The system, the emergency care system, is on the verge of collapse. Dr. Parks says in his letter that it must be dealt with immediately. There's a long list that has been tabled today – it was released to the media earlier today – of the incredible situations that have occurred in our emergency rooms: people having heart attacks and dying while waiting for care, receiving very distressing exams in public places, very private examinations in public places. This is serious stuff.

3:30

There is nothing on the Order Paper that's going to give us an opportunity to debate this, and if we don't debate this, if we don't find a solution to this, Mr. Speaker, people's lives are truly at stake here, and I think everyone in this Chamber knows that. So I would ask that you rule that we do get to have the opportunity today to debate this motion.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to support this motion, and I will speak briefly to the urgency of it. I'll begin by reflecting on the minister of health's comments at a news conference last Wednesday, I believe it was, when he indicated that he himself had called around to the emergency rooms in Edmonton and Calgary to see how overcrowded they were. In total, there were something like 160 people at that moment waiting in Edmonton and Calgary emergency rooms to be admitted for beds that were not available, and that's pretty typical. So as we are standing here today at this moment, it's reasonable to assume that in Edmonton and Calgary alone there are about 150 people waiting in emergency rooms for beds and unable to get them.

Now, I would just like to briefly give you some specific examples, and these are taken from 25 pages of detailed notes given to me by emergency room doctors about their concerns. Every line refers to a case. I obviously won't read them all, but these are people at this moment who are in emergency care. Let me rephrase that. There are people just like the cases I'm going to read who are at this moment in emergency care.

Here's an example, documented events: "Significant cardiac ischemia, only place to assess was triage assess, admitted to [cardiac care unit] direct from waiting room." Next one: "COPD'er with

heart rate of 150 . . . in waiting room for 3hrs before bed available.” Another case: “Multiple chest pain patients in [waiting room], no beds available for exam.” They can’t even be properly examined, Mr. Speaker. Imagine: what could be more urgent than going to the emergency room with clamping pain on your chest and not having any space to be assessed? It doesn’t get more urgent than that.

Here’s another real-life example:

Recorded by 0600 shift Doctor: arrived at 0600, multiple patients in [waiting room] with prolonged waits, and in capital letters,

No Free Beds In Entire [emergency department] to see patients. Saw two complex elderly patients with significant pain who filled the two existing triage assess beds (so had no area to even do triage ECG’s, [electrocardiograms]). Assessed five patients from a chair in the alcove beside E-pod (a non patient care area with no curtains or equipment).

That’s happening in our emergency rooms as we speak.

Saw my first patient in an ED bed at 0845 . . . A patient with drug overdose and seizure arrived with EMS at 0549, and finally got into an ED bed at 1100 for assessment and treatment.

I’ll just read one more, Mr. Speaker, because I know how much you value time. I need to show the members here 25 pages of detailed cases. I could go on for hours.

A patient with a seizure was in the [waiting room] >5hrs awaiting assessment and treatment.

A seizure in a waiting room waiting five hours for assessment and treatment.

When I finished my . . . shift, patient was still not in a bed. It was a miserable day. On that day there was an [emergency in-patient] in the department who had been . . .

Get this, Mr. Speaker.

. . . an admitted patient in the [emergency department] for 1 whole week!

I don’t know what could speak more clearly to the urgency of this issue.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for bringing the matter forward at this time for discussion and those who have spoken before me. At the same time I don’t want to in any way, shape, or form detract from the seriousness of the situation although we do need some clarity on that, which I’ll get to in a moment.

Emergency room care is extremely important. We depend on it. We rely on it. That has been eloquently phrased by other speakers before me. I just want to endorse that I, too, recognize how important this particular issue is. That’s why they call it emergency.

However, I think what we need to deal with right now at this particular stage of the discussion, Mr. Speaker, following the presentation is: what constitutes urgency as defined or as has become the traditional definition in a House of Parliament such as we sit in today? More specifically, what are the criteria that would persuade a Speaker such as yourself or someone else to consider this a genuine urgency in terms of Legislature process?

Typically people will turn, as members have already, to *Beauchesne*, the sixth edition, 390, which has been cited. I just want to cite it again because it’s important for the public and for all members, particularly some who are new members and maybe don’t have as much experience with SO 30s as others here clearly do, to understand what 390 says. It says:

“Urgency” within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means “urgency of debate”, when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be

brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

You yourself have commented on this particular ruling on a number of occasions. One of the more recent ones, Mr. Speaker, obviously, was April 19, 2010. I know I need not remind you of that, but in your ruling on that day, which, by the way, was also health related – it dealt with ophthalmological services – you cited what some of the requirements were that talked to urgency as defined by our parliamentary system. As part of that definition you and others on previous occasions would look at urgency in terms of whether or not there are opportunities, specifically other opportunities than today, to discuss, debate, question, or otherwise refer to the subject at hand.

We have already heard today, for example, more than 20 questions in question period that talked about health care related issues, and many of them were focused on the emergency care circumstance. Previous speakers have already also read directly from some of the letters and quoted people who have written in. So I want to say that there have been opportunities. There will be more opportunities for question period, for example.

Secondly, there will be additional opportunities as well as we introduce the Alberta Health Act, which, by the way, is on the Order Paper. Thank you, hon. members; someone did refer to that. It is on page 13 of our Order Paper under Leave to Introduce a Bill, Alberta Health Act, and my name is cited there as well. So there are opportunities to discuss under that act care, health care, and access to that care, and that is partly what this is all about.

Again, I do not in any way, shape, or form want to diminish the importance of emergency care and looking after it, but I have taken action immediately, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services has taken action immediately. I will be meeting with the person who authored the letter tomorrow. Fortunate for him, he had a holiday booked and had to honour it. I respect that, so the soonest we can get together is tomorrow.

My last point, Mr. Speaker, is simply that adjourning all of the important business of this House will not result in a specific decision or a specific action to be taken by this House. Debate here will not culminate in anything new or different by way of specific action. Now, that is not to say that specific action is not under way. It is. We’re already opening 250 more beds in Edmonton and Calgary, for example. It’s a combination: acute-care beds, transition beds, subacute beds, and other continuing care beds. All of this is important. We’ve opened over 800 continuing care beds alone since April of this year.

3:40

We have a lot of things that are going on right now. I answered some of those questions earlier, Mr. Speaker. I will not take the time of the House other than to say that the issue of understanding what urgency is in terms of legislative process is a lot different than understanding urgency in terms of the matter itself as clarified in *Beauchesne*.

I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’ve given opportunity for all groups to participate with respect to this. It’s 19 minutes to 4 o’clock on a private members’ day. I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave to proceed is in order.

First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has met the requirement for providing at least two hours’ notice to the Speaker’s office. Notice was received in my office this morning at 8:39 a.m.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed could be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether

the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to “a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.” Needless to say, members have already pointed out parliamentary authorities on this subject, *Beauchesne*’s in paragraphs 387 to 390 and pages 689 to 696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and we know what the motion is.

I’ve been listening intently to the arguments put forward to the Standing Order 30 application, and I certainly would like to thank the hon. members who participated for participating. There’s no doubt in the chair’s mind that the issues concerning emergency medical services are of considerable importance to Albertans. The last time that the Assembly met was, I believe, April 21 of 2010, nearly six months or so ago. Today there were 18 hon. members recognized in the question period. Ten of the questions basically related to health-related matters, emergency related matters and the like.

This is normally a private members’ day. I heard that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere indicated that this was probably one of the most vital and one of the most important items that one could look at, and it’s his bill that would be scheduled for today, so I presume that on private members’ day that hon. member would be quite prepared to have his bill moved down the Order Paper to be dealt with another day. That gives you, I guess, an indication of the seriousness of what this is all about.

I heard the minister indicate that he’s visited some 23 or more emergency rooms in recent days, and there’s always an opportunity for new ideas to be generated.

If you look at page 695 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the chair may also “take into account the general wish of the House to have an emergency debate,” and the chair did hear that from a number of people. The reflection of 10 questions out of 18 earlier this afternoon, including questions on health from government members, would suggest that there is a general willingness to proceed with the debate on this matter.

As a result of all of that, I do find that the request for leave is in order, but there is a process we have to follow. I have to put forward a question to you on this, and there are some ways that this can go. Before putting the question to the Assembly, I would like to remind you of the rules governing the procedure once the chair finds a request for leave in order. I’ve found the request for leave to be in order. Standing Order 30 requires that the question be put to a vote of the Assembly.

If there are any objections to the question, then the chair will ask those members who support the motion to rise in their places. If 15 or more members rise, the debate will proceed, and each member who wishes to speak will have 10 minutes to do so until all who wish to speak have done so until the normal House adjournment. Okay? If 15 or more members rise, we go immediately; I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to proceed.

If at least five members rise but less than 15, the question of whether the member has leave to move adjournment of the ordinary business is put immediately and, if necessary, is determined by division. So if five to 14 members rise, we have a vote. If fewer than five members rise, the motion will not proceed despite the fact that the chair will ask: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[There being objection taken to the question, the Speaker requested that those members who support the motion rise in their place. Ten members rose, which under Standing Order 30(4)(b) required the Speaker to immediately put the question whether the member has leave to move the ordinary business of the Assembly]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a division with respect to a question arising out of a Standing Order 30 application: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? Because of the very nature of the rules a certain number of people rose, which automatically clicked in the procedure for the bells. The bells have now rung. Ten minutes have gone by. This is a simple majority vote.

For the motion:

Anderson	Hehr	Mason
Blakeman	Hinman	Notley
Boutilier	Kang	Taft
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Amery	Horner	Prins
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Redford
Brown	Knight	Renner
Calahasen	Liepert	Rogers
Campbell	Lund	Sandhu
DeLong	Marz	Snelgrove
Denis	Mitzel	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Morton	Weadick
Drysdale	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Olson	Xiao
Griffiths	Ouellette	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 33
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The Speaker: That application has not been approved by the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you also had a Standing Order 30 application.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today at the appropriate point in the proceedings I had given oral notice of my desire to move a Standing Order 30 to adjourn the regular course of business to debate what we felt and still feel is a very urgent piece of public business that requires debate. I am very aware that this is private members’ day today, and I will move as quickly as I can through this as I wish to have this considered as quickly as possible.

The motion, which has been delivered to the table and which I read into the record earlier, is to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the urgent matter of

the sale of approximately 16,000 acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

4:00

Under the urgency argument, Mr. Speaker, again referring you to the usual sections in *Beauchesne* and in the new *Canadian House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, this development requires irrigation. We have been given an indication, both in this House today but also from those that are more closely affected than I am, that cabinet is considering this decision imminently. This truly

brings into sharp focus the urgency of the decisions that are being made here, particularly around the fact that this development will require irrigation. There is no public knowledge of where the water will come from. The South Saskatchewan and Bow rivers have been closed to new water allocations, so that public question of water, everyone's fresh glass of drinking water, remains unanswered. The urgency for a discussion before the government makes a final decision is very relevant to my motion.

The concern throughout the nation is that water allocation is a critical issue. Water crosses our borders to other provinces and flows downstream, or not, to municipalities. Concern over availability of drinking water for residents is high. There is a question about real oversight regarding the sale of this public land owned by all Albertans because the government is refusing to have a public consultation on it and is falling back under the regulations. Given that they are selling this as agricultural land, they are allowed not to have public consultations, but that does mean that there's a very short timeline. The economic, environmental, and social impacts on people of that community and further is definitely urgent. So there is an issue of urgency around limiting public oversight.

The parameters in *Beauchesne* 387 to 398, whether there is opportunity for debate under the rules and provisions of the House, just very quickly. There are no other opportunities available to us, Mr. Speaker. It's not before the courts. It wasn't mentioned in the throne speech. There's no government bill on the Order Paper. There's no private member's public bill on the Order Paper. It wasn't outlined or any discussion of it alluded to in the government media release of October 19 that outlined the government's legislative session for the fall. The release date of a supplementary supply budget and what opportunity there might be for debate is also unknown at this point and also not expected. There's no notice for anything else on the Order Paper, written questions or motions for returns, that might satisfy that requirement for debate. We did ask a leader's question in Oral Question Period today and tried to set the issues out in a private member's statement, and we have been rebuffed by the government in attempts to get answers to our question.

Given that this is being reviewed today – we'd heard that it was going to be reviewed on Friday, now perhaps today or tomorrow. This is a decision that's being made without public consultation. It very much affects the land, the wildlife, and the habitat, and that has an effect on generations to come. Our ability to have any input on this decision, to have any public scrutiny and oversight on this decision, is very limited in time in that cabinet is deciding, and once that decision is made, it's moving on.

Again, I underline how urgent the issue of water allocation is. We have long awaited changes to the government's water management plan. We've not had anything in that, and especially relevant is the lack of the South Saskatchewan land-use plan. There seems to be a race to get this done by the government before that land-use plan comes into play. That, again, is the urgency of making this a full and public debate.

Given those concerns that I have raised, the moratorium on the issuance of new water licences over the basin for a number of years because of the water scarcity, where's that water coming from? It's also stressed the aquatic ecosystems there. There is no environmental assessment that we're aware of. There was no information coming from government on an environmental assessment around this land sale, with the fact that it is being rushed through before the South Saskatchewan regional land-use framework would come into effect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on this point. It's the Standing Order 30 application we're talking about.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We stand as the Wildrose caucus to support this urgent debate on the sale of 16,000 acres of Crown land. The reason why it's so urgent is because of all of the information that has come out in the news. The minister has even gone on to say that they would donate the proceeds from this to an environmental group, which just shows the problems in the whole situation.

In a democracy we allow an open debate. If this isn't brought forward now, at any date it's imminent that this could be signed and pushed through without any debate here in the House and certainly no input from those on the outside. A democracy also allows for competition, and there is none allowed. If we don't have the debate today, it's too late. If the minister signs off and sells this land, there's no opportunity for these other groups to even bid and purchase that. It wouldn't surprise me one bit if a wildlife group would come up and bid more money than perhaps the group that's put the proposal forward.

It's so critical that we have this debate today because of the news that's been leaking out there with this government saying that they're going to sign this off and that it's okay: we've been doing this for a hundred years. It isn't okay. We need to have the public debate. I would urge every member in here to vote in favour of this so that we could have the open debate.

The idea that we have question period and that allows for a debate: that's a 30-second question. There's no debate. There are no ideas. There are no proposals allowed to be put in there, and there certainly are no answers. As you often say, Mr. Speaker, it's question period, not answer period. They were asked earlier, and they weren't in there.

We need to have a debate. It's urgent because of the fact that the government has said that, yes, they're looking at it, and they could sign it any day. We'd urge all members to support this so that we could have an emergency debate and have the proper democratic process here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other members to participate on the Standing Order 30 application? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Knight: Yes. Mr. Speaker, this clearly is not a matter of urgency. What we have in front of us and what this is all about is a proposal. It's a proposal that has not been and may never be concluded. The opposition is clearly predicting a future course of action of the government, and as usual I would suggest that the opposition is determining government action based on newspaper articles, headlines, and TV ads. In reality this proposal for ag development will be assessed for its merits relative to conservation, environmental protection, wildlife habitat, and the economic impact in the region.

Mr. Speaker, the standing order, I believe, does indicate that in order for a motion to proceed, it needs to meet conditions. "The matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency." I would submit that this is not an emergency of any sort, genuine or otherwise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: That's it? Okay.

Hon. members, thank you very much for your position with respect to the Standing Order 30 application. The application was

received in the Speaker's office this morning at 10:54, and it certainly fulfills all the requirements in terms of the administrative side of this. Standing Order 30 clearly indicates "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

It has to do with a matter dealing with

the sale of approximately 16,000 acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

Needless to say, the discussion had nothing to do with the motion at the moment but the urgency of it all.

4:10

Based on the arguments put forward, particularly the arguments put forward by the minister in this case, who highlights that this is only a proposal, that this has not been advanced and may never be advanced, the chair has to listen very attentively to those kinds of words and presumes that this matter will be coming back in by way of debate in the question period and other activities in the days to come.

In this case I'm sorry, but I don't find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204

Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010.

Bill 204 proposes to limit year-over-year increases in overall government spending to the greater of either the rate of inflation plus population growth or to where total government per capita spending is equal to or lesser than the average per capita spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is greater.

This bill is necessary because our province currently is spending beyond its means and has been doing so for a very long time. Despite record-high revenues over the past five years, despite a recession that although difficult was not even remotely as deep or as long as the last two to hit Alberta, our financial picture has become very bleak. Our sustainability fund is, by the government's own rosy predictions, set to expire in roughly two years. We are not only burning through our savings but accruing billions in debt for future generations to pay. Sadly, any interest made on the heritage fund over the past decade has been spent on the here and now, leaving not one cent for our kids and grandkids during a time when our natural resources have never been worth more and may never be worth this much again.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

This government's per person spending has been first or second in the country for a very long time. Not only is this unsustainable but Albertans are not getting sufficient value for this spending. We see this with a health care system on the brink of collapse, as our emergency docs have said this past week, and we see this with a

massive school shortage in many municipalities, like Airdrie and Chestermere, while perfectly good schools in other communities are closed and unnecessary new ones opened.

We are building billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure with no money left over to staff it. We may be building a lot of buildings and roads, but how can we expect our children to staff and maintain it all 20 years from now if we can't even afford to do it today? What kind of legacy is that? The temptation to impress constituents with unnecessary frills, the knee-jerk reaction to solve societal problems with public spending, and a general desire to be seen to be doing something regardless of how effective it is have become far too ingrained in our political culture.

We owe it to our children to change this culture of waste and government largesse. In my view, spending away our rainy-day fund within a short few years and piling up billions in new debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund them is to substantially raise taxes and to increase debt on future generations.

Bill 204 is the first step in a spending addiction recovery program. If we can take this first step as a province, the road back to fiscal sustainability is achievable. Not only does this kind of spending guideline make intuitive sense, it is not a new invention. Similar initiatives have proven to be very effective in other jurisdictions, and this plan is endorsed by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Fraser Institute, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, among others.

Let me take a moment to head off some misconceptions that I've heard surrounding this legislation. First of all, Parliamentary Counsel has confirmed that it is not a money bill and is therefore suitable for introduction as a private member's bill.

Some are concerned that if we fall behind other provinces in spending, we will not be able to deliver some of the core government services as well as other provinces do. To this I would point out that the formula calls for a limit in spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth or a spending increase equal to the average per capita program spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is greater. Accordingly, when this legislation eventually brings us back into the middle of the pack in terms of per capita provincial spending – and given our lead, this will take some time – we will be able to remain there and not fall behind other provinces.

Others have wrongfully pointed to problems in California. As we know, California is dealing with program cuts required to meet their balanced budget legislation. Balanced budget legislation is not the same as spending limitation laws. They are two entirely different pieces of legislation.

As we know too well in Alberta, revenues can swing wildly from year to year. This may mean that in a severe downturn revenues may plummet so dramatically that achieving a balanced budget is impossible without substantive cuts. That's not what this law does. Bill 204 limits year-over-year spending increases. It actually insulates governments from the need to drastically slash spending because it guards against massive overspending during good times so that when revenues do drop sharply – and sometimes they do – the need for cuts, if any, will be much, much less.

For a better comparison we should look to the state of Colorado, which passed a taxpayer bill of rights in 1992, that included a provision that government spending cannot exceed inflation plus population growth. Because of this law Colorado taxpayers enjoy a robust economy at lower tax rates than most other states. Their deficit during the past recession was very, very small compared with

other states. In fact, the success of their innovative move in 1992 prompted many other U.S. states to pass expenditure limitation laws of their own.

Bill 204 will also make our long-term fiscal planning much stronger. By knowing what our expenditures will be down the road, we'll be better able to engage in long-term tax and debt reduction planning. This bill will also allow for a more manageable long-term saving strategy to be put in place. This is due to the economic fact that over the long term GDP and the tax revenues generated therefrom will outstrip the rate of inflation and population growth. This means we can save more and that we can tax less over time. What a legacy that would be. We could turn a sea of volatile, nonrenewable oil and gas into a mountain of permanent investment capital accruing with interest each and every year.

Another benefit of this bill and one that should appeal to the members opposite is that it will help moderate the expectations of the public as well as public-sector workers when it comes to how much the government is able to spend. Politicians will be able to use this legislation to help stiffen their resolve when it comes to saying no to things that are not priorities or to saying no to massive wage hikes that taxpayers simply cannot afford. While I believe the stability this bill offers will be positive for our social programs in the long run, making them far more efficient than they are today, it will still have the effect of curtailing the size and the scope of government bureaucracy. Departments will look for innovative ways to provide more efficient and better services by reallocating existing resources rather than simply asking for more funding while perpetuating outdated and wasteful programs and practices.

The bottom line is this. If our federal and provincial governments of the day had controlled spending in this way starting in 2000, both would be running surpluses this year despite being in the midst of a global slowdown. According to the calculations of CFIB inflation and population growth have increased by 72 per cent since 1997. Program expenditures, on the other hand, have increased 159 per cent, more than double that rate. Infrastructure is not even part of that calculation. That's just program expenses like staffing and overhead.

If Alberta's government had adopted this initiative in 1997, our financial future would be something we could be proud of. The \$852 million deficit of 2008 would have instead been a \$9.85 billion surplus. Even if we had only adopted it in 2002, our surplus in 2008 would have been \$6.36 billion. This year, instead of projecting a record \$7.6 billion cash deficit that is wiping out our emergency savings, we would be running a small surplus, one backed by a large sustainability fund and a heritage fund much larger than the one we have today. Instead of letting our heritage fund run down with stock prices and raiding its gains when investments rebound, we would have been making substantial contributions to it over the last five years. This would be a legacy we could have been proud of. It is a legacy that we can still build, but we have to start now, and passing Bill 204 is a first step in the right direction.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because clearly this bill, that is put forward by a private member, really is about guarding against waste. It allows for better planning in the long term and also in the medium term, not to mention in the immediate short term. Factoring in the key components of inflation and population growth I think is clearly an example of what Martha

and Henry have been doing in their homes. It is an Alberta value. It's a value of how we care for our home. Do we go forward and spend like drunken sailors, or do we go and try to manage within the economics of what we're faced with today? Martha and Henry, who ultimately are all of our bosses in our constituencies, where we live, have told us: government, you need to operate like we operate in our Alberta households.

4:20

This bill really is a road map, and it's anchored by the pragmatism of Alberta values, Alberta values that talk about: spend within reason; don't spend more than what you have. No matter how good the times are or how bad the times are, we want to ensure that our future is looked after.

It's interesting. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, I know, has a family of four boys aged one to six years old. This is really not about today; it's about tomorrow. It's about our future and about our children. Earlier today the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake said about the grade 6 schoolchildren he introduced: our future leaders. Well, this very private member's bill is exactly about what the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake talked about in terms of our children. It is about putting a fence around spending.

I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster; I see the member from Bragg Creek. Clearly, the Treasury Board president and the minister of finance have demonstrated in past years the importance of putting a rein on spending. Really, I'm sure they'll probably go out and consider buying the hon. member a ginger ale after this because of the motion of this. I see the hon. minister of finance shaking his head in agreement, so I can assume from that that he will be supporting this actual private member's bill. I'm glad to see that, and I will continue on since this is my time at this time.

The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's four boys: clearly, it is about our future and the economics. As the OECD countries have mentioned in the past, Canada in its spending, in terms of what's taking place in health care today and in this private motion, is an example of a train wreck ready to happen. Let's avoid it. Let's keep this on the rails. I believe this road map the hon. member is talking about is a very helpful road map. To the Minister of Transportation: a road map is always good because it sets the path in terms of where we go in the future. This will be for protecting those very children that he introduced today and all of our children.

I ask the hon. members in this Assembly today, clearly, to support this important economic road map in terms of laying a foundation and putting a fence around some of the needless and wasteful spending that has taken place before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, as sponsored by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Essentially, this piece of legislation aims to place restrictions on current and future legislators by limiting annual increases in government spending. It would amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act by limiting spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth as determined by Stats Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member's intentions in bringing forward this piece of legislation. After all, fiscal prudence and responsibility are the cornerstones of this government. Fiscal responsibility allowed this government to eliminate the deficit and pay off nearly \$23 billion in debt, and it allowed us to save billions of dollars in the sustainability fund in the event of future economic

downturns. These policies have positioned Alberta to weather the current economic downturn better than most any other jurisdiction in North America. Furthermore, this government has committed itself to eliminating the current deficit within three years. We'll do so by controlling the growth of spending, which can certainly be accomplished without legislation.

Mr. Speaker, while I agree with the spirit of the intent of this legislation, I don't believe that it should be the law, and that was a clear message that we got from our party membership a year ago, when they defeated a similar resolution brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I will respect the message that we got from Albertans that day after a very healthy debate.

While limiting spending to inflation plus population growth is one method to control spending, it's not without flaws and limitations. For example, annual population growth does not necessarily match the practical demand on government for services, programs, and infrastructure. We all know that the requirement for government to spend money does not always come in small, predictable, bite-sized pieces, as was certainly evident in recent years, and it's impacted by many factors, including changing demographics. As an example, in the years to come, Alberta's seniors population will grow faster than our average population growth. For our government and for future governments this will mean a significant increase in the needs for seniors supports and medical services, that I do not want to hold from those people.

Other examples are postsecondary education, whose enrolment may not coincide with total population growth, and employment services or community supports, whose needs are more closely tied to global economic factors than local population increases.

Another real example is the 6 per cent increase allocated to Alberta Health Services over the next three years. Mr. Speaker, this certainly would not fit in with this formula. As calculated by the Minister of Health and Wellness, this 6 per cent comes from 2 per cent for inflation estimates, 2 and a half per cent for demographic changes in health care, and 1 and a half per cent for changes in innovation, pharmaceuticals, and different types of treatments. Certainly, that does not align with this kind of formula, but I think most Albertans agree that that's very prudent.

Essentially, total population growth is not an accurate reflection of the financial demands on government. Furthermore, a large component of government spending is comprised of wages, and these contracts can often be influenced by the demand for and supply of skilled labour and wages in the private sector and in other provinces, and they're often negotiated in multiyear terms. For these reasons government settlements may not be in line with general inflation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 does not reflect the need for government to be responsible to acute regional challenges or to plan ahead for economic growth. The oil sands area and the community of Fort McMurray are a beautiful example of that. Periodically larger investments and infrastructure, transportation, and other social services are required and are indeed prudent. Currently Alberta is investing large amounts in infrastructure. This flexibility enables us to invest at a time when the value for money is at its peak and at a time when we need to keep Albertans working. Furthermore, this investment positions us for economic recovery, and frankly it responds to the demands of Albertans.

This member may want us to reduce spending, but according to his comments it seems it only applies to other constituencies and not necessarily his own. We should remind ourselves that today our revenues do in fact exceed our expenditures for operating costs. When you have a close look at the budget, the current deficit is actually created by a measured and aggressive investment in

Alberta's infrastructure. That's a strategic and deliberate decision, that this member actually contributed to, and by funding those capital assets through our savings, our sustainability fund, we are not accumulating debt like other jurisdictions are doing. This member claims we are piling up billions in new debts on the backs of future generations. Well, Mr. Speaker, piling up savings at the expense of not spending on infrastructure would leave an infrastructure debt for future generations, which is indeed a debt for future generations.

I would encourage all members to go and ask their constituents if they believe we should cut our current infrastructure expenses. I believe we all know the answer to that question before we ask it. A law restricting spending would obstruct the ability of government to make any significant strategic periodic investments in infrastructure or programs when it makes the most sense.

Albertans are no strangers to volatile revenue conditions, and this recession has been no different. Years of unprecedented economic growth quickly gave way to the deepest recession in decades, but Alberta is exposed more than most to the ebb and flow of a resource-based economy, and it is due to this economy that Albertans must have the flexibility to soundly manage its fiscal framework in times of both economic prosperity and recession. Budget 2010 outlined a responsible and measured path to deal with our current difficulties without drastic sacrifice of the essential services that Albertans depend on.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, and most important to me, is that this bill restricts the ability of future legislators and future generations to budget as they see fit. As a wise man once said, it's easy to predict the past, but we do not have a crystal ball, and we don't know what challenges may lie ahead for us or for our children or our grandchildren. Why would we think we know what's best for the Alberta of 2030 or the Alberta of 2050? Why would we want to set up even more challenges for future generations by implementing this legislation, which would restrict the choices they can make and the tools that are at their disposal to enable success? Do we not have confidence in our children to make wise choices? I also have confidence that the legislators of today and of the future will make the best possible choices based on the requirements and the direction of Albertans.

4:30

While I understand why the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere would bring this bill forward as one possible method of ensuring predictable expenditures, I do not believe it's the right fiscal plan for Alberta. Bill 204 may make sense on paper, but when you have to deal with real-life people and real-life challenges and real-life demographics, it's not practical, and it does not reflect the realities of budgeting and planning for Albertans. It would hinder this government's ability to be accountable to Albertans, it would make it more difficult to save and invest according to the needs of dynamic Albertans, and it would obstruct this government and future governments from adequately responding to unforeseen challenges and opportunities. I agree it's good policy, but I believe it's bad law. The allocation of resources is one of the most difficult and important jobs legislators have, and I am not prepared to abdicate that responsibility or to strip it from future generations.

For those reasons I will not be supporting Bill 204, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204. When my children were young, my husband and I didn't have a lot of money. What money we did have went to

paying the mortgage, making sure the utility bills were paid, and buying food. These were what we considered the essentials in life. Because we set out a plan and budgeted for these expenses, any money that was left over went into our savings account. We knew that sometimes there would be unexpected spending emergencies or temporary shortfalls in our income, and this way they would be covered. When we got raises or sometimes unexpected amounts of money in a given year, we tried to keep our budget basically the same because we knew we could live just fine this year on the budget that worked for us last year.

There were two things that made us have to increase our budget, and one was inflation. Obviously, when the cost of gas or groceries goes up, you have to adjust your budget if you can afford to. The other thing that made it necessary to increase our family budget was having children.

This makes obvious sense, and I believe it works as well for government as it does for family. This is what fiscal responsibility means to our family and many other families. To us fiscal responsibility meant that your outgo did not exceed your income. What this meant to us as a family was that one could use credit or have debit to some degree but the challenge was deciding what was permissible debt and what was luxurious debt. For my husband and I there was only one good reason to be in debt, and that was to pay for a house, as there are not a lot of people who can purchase their house in cash.

Mr. Speaker, we have spent many decades operating our household with the understanding that sometimes I can't have what I want when I want it just because I want it. The point I'm trying to make is that because my husband and I budgeted, we knew exactly how much money we had to spend. Just because we made more money one year didn't mean we had to throw last year's budget out the window.

Knowing what you need to spend money on and sticking to it is the key to fiscal responsibility, and that is essentially, in my mind, what Bill 204 is trying to accomplish. Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, will allow the government to curb the kind of runaway spending that we have seen in recent years by implementing a spending cap of inflation plus population growth or the average spending of Canada's remaining provinces, whichever is higher.

What does fiscal responsibility truly mean? Does it mean eliminating the deficit, or does it mean getting the deficit under control? Better yet, Mr. Speaker, what do Albertans want to see? Well, I can only tell you what I have heard over the last many, many months. Albertans want us to establish a tradition of planning, which means they want departments to run efficiently, and they want departments to run with clear outcomes. They want the government to clearly assess needs, and they want the government to clearly set priorities.

Albertans believe effective budgeting and long-term planning is key. Albertans have clearly told us: it is very easy to say no to everything; it is harder to evaluate our province's responsibilities, look at past performances, assess the needs of each department, and decide where the money should go.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, Mr. Speaker. As an MLA I have spent a lot of time talking to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek. Not once do I remember any constituent in Calgary-Fish Creek telling me to come up with a new slogan for Alberta. They quite liked Alberta advantage. They liked what it meant, and they liked having Alberta advantage as their slogan. Yet the government went ahead with \$25 million over three years on rebranding our province. What a waste of money. The money that was spent on this foolish initiative could have been used for – let me think. How about home care for a few thousand seniors to free up acute-care beds?

Mr. Speaker, we must be fiscally responsible and live under spending restraints in the same manner that our Alberta families do. The government members will stand up and talk about the downturn in the economy – and, you know, I truly understand that – even though it was made a lot worse in the province because of the government's poor policies.

The Member for Athabasca-Redwater speaks about how members from their Progressive Conservative convention did not support the motion from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Well, Mr. Speaker, as someone who was on the other side, I saw hundreds and hundreds of motions or resolutions go through the convention floor when I was a member of the Progressive Conservatives. What happened to them? One of the biggest criticisms from the Progressive Conservatives who went to the convention was: what's happening to the motions and resolutions that hit the floor?

We also know that resource revenues in this province are subject to fluctuations which make it nearly impossible to forecast a specified revenue level. That's why our spending should be more independent of nonrenewable resources. We have seen this before and, quite frankly, should have learned the lesson already. Mr. Speaker, I love the Boy Scout's slogan, and I think it's a good one: Be Prepared.

I'm like many Albertans; I want us to restore the Alberta advantage. Alberta should be leading this country in fiscal responsibility, not in big government and not in huge debt. I urge everyone to support the bill so that our fiscal future will be on solid ground.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess this is what private members' business is for: to have an idea, and you can kind of dance around the facts a little bit and try and get across your point. And that's fine. The hon. member has his turn at the draw, and he's made it.

The problem I have with putting in a significant policy such as one that would limit your government's opportunity to look after its citizens, whether it be population plus inflation or whatever formula you want to jiggle around and come up with, is that in private members' business and committee we'll have roughly two hours to talk about the ramifications of what that might mean to health care or to seniors or to children's services: all departments that have tremendous stress, even more so in times of a downturn.

In the House, Mr. Speaker, we bring the budget in, and we spend roughly 70 hours in committee questioning the departments and the different ministries on where their priorities are. I don't think that it's practical for a private member to suggest that two hours in committee would set the tone for a government as compared to 70 hours every year to talk about the priorities.

The other flaw, and there are many, is in saying: well, you know, we don't have to deal with disasters; we can deal with them separately. That's true, but we also have other departments that have funding that they must account for, that they have no choice in. Environment, for example, maintains the carbon fund. That is an industry fund that revolves through their department, counts against their targets, but they really have no say in how much is contributed. It depends on the amount of buy-up there is and how much is to be spent back out. So if you're going to limit overall government spending, you may in a way be actually stopping some of the really good environmental initiatives that we have.

4:40

Some of the funding we're owed by the federal government, for example, health care. If we were to receive, finally, the roughly

\$800 million that Albertans are rightfully owed by the federal government on behalf of health care transfers, if you were to limit our spending to population plus inflation, we wouldn't be able to take it. We could take it, I guess, and put it in the bank, but the people that they've talked about all afternoon waiting for emergency room service probably wouldn't appreciate that very much.

Mr. Speaker, it also is important when they talk about: well, we can cut back on infrastructure. Like the Member for Athabasca-Redwater said, it's funny when you have your infrastructure how easy it is to suggest that others don't need it. For the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to suggest in any way, shape, or form that the area that he pretends to represent can possibly build the infrastructure and provide the services they need for the next ten years on population plus inflation is to suggest that he's not in touch with what's going on in his own backyard. To suggest that the growth areas like Airdrie, Lloydminster, Grande Prairie, and others will be able to just manage on population plus inflation: "Oh, well, just take it from someone else. As long as we get our own, we're good. As long as we make a headline, it appears that they're happy."

Mr. Speaker, the budget of Alberta deserves the full and complete attention of this Assembly for the time that's allocated at this point, and the people will continue to make decisions on that budget. For as long as they have this government they will be the ones in charge of where the priorities are in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't hear you there with the roaring applause that we got for this government for wanting to have no constraints on its spending.

It's interesting in these tough times how they spin the story. It wasn't too long ago when this government had huge surpluses, and thank heavens they had the foresight or, should I say, the problem that they couldn't spend enough money, that they were forced to have a sustainability fund. Back earlier, when for the first time in years we were running surpluses, in 2005, they changed their attitude. Rather than saving any surplus, it was to spend. It's interesting that the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater said, you know: well, in tough times we have a great opportunity to increase our spending because the price is down. But the real problem was that we spent \$18 billion on infrastructure in about an 18-month period when the price was double what it currently is.

Government constraint is the toughest thing to do when you have free access to spend other people's money. It's very easy, and this government has fallen into that problem, that when something starts to come unfolded and there's a problem in front of them, they say: well, throw money at it. Yet they don't look at the consequences.

Let's just talk about the emergency room dilemma that we're being faced with right now and the shortage of beds. For two and a half years the Premier, the Executive Council, everybody knew that there was a problem, but we hadn't had a crisis yet, so it was ongoing. We've spent hundreds of millions of dollars building new facilities to shut down old ones that were still functional. To think that there's no way that we could move forward without spending a lot of money just simply isn't true. There are many, many good ways of planning to have that sustainability.

Let's go back and realize that in 2005 going through to 2008 a tremendous amount of money was spent on infrastructure. They were chasing the dollar and those people who could provide those services right up the ladder of expenses. We were spending an enormous amount of money. We even had bids put out where no

bids were accepted because they couldn't do it, so we had a real problem. What does it come back to? It's fiscal restraint. Had there been restraint, where they couldn't increase their spending because the inflation and the population hadn't jumped that much, we would've had a lot more money in the sustainability fund. More important is that you'd have that gradual increase that is sustainable.

We continue to ask and press this government for what their 10-year sustainability plan is. They say that they have one. What's their infrastructure plan? Put that list out, and show this highway 63, this highway 3 to Medicine Hat. Prioritize it, and let us see where it is and what the estimates are on those. But, more important, if this government really wants to ensure that the tax dollars are spent right, that restraint needs to be there where they don't cycle and say: oh, we got some extra money; let's bid high and get all this done this year. This is about the boom years. That's when the restraint needs to be kept in. Had we kept that restraint in during the boom years and not spent our money foolishly, then we would have had lots more in the kitty right now in the heritage trust fund and the sustainability fund. More importantly, we could have had sustainable growth through our infrastructure. We could have addressed those areas.

It's interesting that the member says that Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and Airdrie wouldn't be able to address their needs. They're correct. They wouldn't with the current formula that this government has. They suck a huge amount of money out of these communities and refuse to send any back. We need to change the political scene and the way we divide the dollars up.

If we were to change and acknowledge that we have three levels of government and only one taxpayer and to turn the three levels of government into, let's say, a think tank and say, "Okay; how are we going to divide up our responsibilities? How are we going to divide up our spending?" we wouldn't get the overlap that we have. Currently the federal government can take money from the taxpayer, the provincial government can take money from the taxpayer, and the municipal government gets the last dibs at it on property taxes and a few other local access fees and other things that they might throw at us. Then the taxpayer is left in this dilemma: you know, for the infrastructure that we need here, there aren't the tax dollars here.

If we were to just take two steps back and look at the pool of money that leaves an area and say that a percentage was to come back on a formula base, then you'd see that boom areas like Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary, all those areas that were booming – the capital is leaving. It's just not coming back because greedy government grabs hold of it and says: we're going to spend it on our pet projects. And that they do, whether it's \$2 billion for a CO₂ plan that isn't proven yet and jumping ahead on those things. But the point is that the government grabs it. We need to have that restraint.

This government has spent billions of dollars during the boom years at a very poor valuation for the taxpayers. Now they're saying: oh, we can spend billions of dollars now, which is going to help the taxpayers. But the problem is again going to happen. I don't know. There are still quite a few members here that were here back in 2003-2004, when the government decided that we wanted to be out of debt by 2005. They actually cut the infrastructure spending from about \$3 billion down to \$1.5 billion, and it absolutely destroyed the industry. All of a sudden there was twice as much capacity in the industry than the government was spending because they wanted to save at a time when they needed to be spending or to have that steady growth.

What this bill is about is the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That's why we need to pass this bill, to restrain government from uncontrolled spending, that they're always tempted to do when a problem

arises: “Oh, we’ll throw some money at it. We can make this area happy; we can appease this area.” The truth is that this government wants to be able to increase its political slush funds and spend them on areas where they deem the problem is in order to try and buy the votes, to bring those people in.

It’s interesting, though. You know, the groups – and again, people will say that these are conservative groups. I’d call them sound economic think tanks. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce has brought forward that we need to have this restraint on our spending to population and inflation. The Fraser Institute, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation are among the many that realize the importance of this bill.

This isn’t something to scoff at lightly and say: “Oh, we don’t need it. We don’t want to be restrained. We can’t respond to an emergency.” Those emergency aspects can and should be kept in a separate silo. If, in fact, we have a major problem with the pine beetle, forest fires, whatever it is, that’s very different. Everybody understands that when their house is burning, you throw all your resources at it. We’re not talking about those things. We’re just talking the day- to-day operations of this government saying: “Oh, we need to respond here. We need to respond to this one. Let’s spend some money here.” There’s no thought even to what the cost of building this building is, let alone what we’re going to have to spend to operate it or if we actually have the nurses and the doctors to operate this.

4:50

I found it amazing in question period today that the question was asked many, many times: where are you going to get the money for the 200 extra beds in order to appease the problems in the emergency rooms? Yet they seemed to say: oh, we put out a five-year budget. They can guarantee it. It’s going to be 6 per cent these next two years, as if the opening of 200 beds isn’t going to cost anything new. Here they are speaking to that when we already have a cash income deficit of over \$7 billion this year. The health boards had an over 13 per cent increase, I believe, to address their past one. They’ve already got every dollar allocated and spent. Then to say that we’re going to spend money on 200 more beds but just reallocate it from somewhere – they’ve already got a huge debt; they cannot reallocate the money.

This is the reason why you need to have fiscal restraint. It’s why you need to put it and pin it to something like population and inflation growth so that the money just isn’t wildly spent like drunken sailors, and then they look back and say: well, where is the money? They haven’t even looked at the fact that we’re going to open up 200 more beds. Do they have the nurses and the doctors to even fill those? Did they look at all of the costs? They’re not doing that.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker – and I think that it’s very relevant because they’re saying that we’ve discussed the budget. This is what it’s about. This government is throwing out new solutions daily that are costing hundreds of millions of dollars, and we’re not getting good taxpayers’ money. We need to do a better job. We need to have fiscal restraint. We can’t have this bulge in spending. Every time an extra dollar comes in, they don’t even think of the costs of being able to maintain those facilities or those people, keeping them hired, when we run out of money.

I will leave it at that. This is an important bill. It would serve the government well and would serve the taxpayers even better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to stand here today and share some thoughts on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. The central theme of Bill 204 is fiscal control and responsibility. This is a theme that this government knows quite well and a theme that I have personally taken to heart throughout my life. This government’s fiscal control and responsibility has propelled Alberta into arguably the best fiscal position in North America. Alberta has no debt and the lowest taxes in the country as well as long- and short-term savings for the future. We are the envy of our neighbours across North America. I would say that this shows that we have been incredibly fiscally responsible, especially when compared to other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of Bill 204 is to improve upon this already enviable scenario. However, I would argue that the proposal made by the proposed legislation might not address that goal. Specifically, Bill 204 proposes to limit government spending to a formula where total spending increases are equal to population growth plus inflation. In this formula both the rates of population growth and inflation would be determined by Statistics Canada and then would be multiplied by current government spending to determine the spending limit in the next year. It is also worth noting that under the proposed legislation spending exceptions would be made for disaster relief efforts.

My concerns with Bill 204 are twofold. Firstly, enacting legislation to control government spending effectively hampers the government’s fiscal flexibility. Secondly, tying government spending to a formula may not take into account Alberta’s volatile, resource-based economy. In short, governments must have the flexibility to act on economic changes and be accountable for those actions. Therefore, I believe that the ideals proposed in Bill 204 are well intentioned, but I am not convinced of its practical application.

The place for a government to exercise fiscal responsibility is through time-honoured vehicles like the throne speech and the annual budget process. Zero-based budgeting gives the opportunity to examine programs to see if they are still required or if they should be modified or eliminated. A standard formula for increases does not provide this incentive.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, my first concern is that Bill 204 would dramatically limit the government’s ability to be flexible in its year-to-year spending. Flexibility is important to every decision-maker, be they business leaders, governments, or households. In the household concept people need to be able to spend more money as they need to and save when they don’t. For example, it might be advantageous for a person to spend above a spending cap when goods are on sale or at bargain prices. This can help ensure getting value for your money.

This example holds true even if we take this example to the provincial level. As we have seen, during a period of economic slowdown the cost of commodities and labour may decrease. The cost of infrastructure, for example, can drop significantly. A wise government would use this decrease in cost to invest in public infrastructure projects. A bridge, roadway, or building could be built for far less than during a boom time. Essentially, this means that taxpaying citizens would be getting more for their tax dollar.

Mr. Speaker, if we were to enact proposals brought forth in Bill 204, we would not be able to reap benefits such as this. An economic downturn would come, and building prices would drop, but we would be unable to invest when prices are low. Now, some may argue that we would be able to simply shift funds from one department to another to take advantage of low construction costs. However, I would argue that initiating short-term cuts to programs

in order to pay for infrastructure at an opportune time may in fact do more harm than good.

The second concern I have with Bill 204 centres on how the proposed restrictions might not work with Alberta's volatile economy. Mr. Speaker, as we all know, Alberta's economy can change quickly. For example, during periods of economic boom Alberta can see a huge influx of people move into the province. These people all require government services such as education and health care, and it is our responsibility as a government to provide these services to them. Providing services for this influx of people could mean spending more than our budget allows for.

Now, it is true that the formula proposed in Bill 204 takes into account population growth. However, I would argue that during a period of economic boom the population of Alberta could rise at such a rate that this formula, which takes into account the population of the past year, might not be responsive to rapid population growth. Moreover, a budget based on population growth would not take into account Alberta's large shadow populations. After all, centres such as Fort McMurray can experience a huge influx of people that may not be taken into account by Statistics Canada's population figures. These are people that need services provided by the government of Alberta; these are people that need health care and transportation networks. These are people that must be budgeted for. The measures proposed in Bill 204 do not allow government the flexibility it needs to effectively provide services to Albertans in periods of economic boom.

Now, this is not to say that fiscal control and responsibility is a bad thing. As I said initially, I'm a strong proponent of fiscal responsibility. Rather, Mr. Speaker, sound financial management has always been a cornerstone of this government, and I would argue that our track record of debt elimination and tax reduction speaks for itself. This government has proven itself to be a wise steward of Alberta's wealth. Therefore, I would call into question the need for Bill 204. Government spending should meet the needs of Albertans now and into the future. This includes fiscal sustainability, which this government has practised in the past and will continue to practise in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I will state again that the intention of this bill is good. After all, fiscal restraint is something that most of us can agree on. However, I am unconvinced that the measures proposed in Bill 204 will effectively achieve its objectives or lead to any improvement in our already enviable fiscal situation.

The place for a government to exercise fiscal responsibility is through the time-honoured vehicles of the throne speech and the annual budget process. This government will show its accountability through these vehicles and be judged on its delivery of services to Albertans within its own fiscal guidelines.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is 5 o'clock. Standing Order 8(1) requires that Motions other than Government Motions be called. Therefore, the time limit for the consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Child and Youth Health Charter

509. Mr. Rogers moved on behalf of Dr. Sherman:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health

charter sponsored by the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and begin debate on Motion 509 on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The intention of Motion 509 is to urge this government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter. I believe that adopting this charter would contribute to the government's continuing goal of ensuring that all children in Alberta are provided with the right tools to maintain a healthy and secure livelihood.

I would first like to discuss how Canada's child and youth health charter was developed as well as to describe the promising framework that this charter provides. Mr. Speaker, the charter was developed through a collaborative process between the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada. These groups are driven by a strong commitment to create a new health legacy for the children of Canada. They hosted a workshop that brought together 40 experts, stakeholders, and key influencers in the area of child health in an effort to establish the framework of the charter.

The framework of this charter is dissected into three main categories. These categories are key to creating an environment where children can reach their full potential and grow up happy, healthy, and secure. Mr. Speaker, the three categories are as follows: children need to develop in, one, a place with a safe and secure environment, both environmental and social; two, a place where children and youth can have good health and development, providing the best child care and educational opportunities; and three, a place where a full range of health resources is available, providing state-of-the-art medical practices and research.

In addition to these three categories, five general principles are applied to each one, which are universality, limiting financial burden on our youth, barrier-free access, measuring and monitoring all progress, and providing safe and secure communities. Mr. Speaker, because this charter was authored by physicians who have first-hand knowledge of these issues, the framework is constructed in a way that will best ensure a child's healthy development.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn to and discuss the positive way in which our government is facilitating objectives to improve child and youth health and how adopting the Canada child and youth health charter would be yet another tool at our disposal to help us meet many of our established government programs. Our government is doing its part to ensure that child health and well-being is of the highest quality in Canada. Although Alberta does not have a child and youth health charter, the government of Alberta strategic business plan as well as business plans for ministries such as Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Wellness make similar commitments that are relevant to the charter.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the first commitment of the charter, stating that children need a place with a safe and secure environment, matches with goals 3, 6, and 7 of the Alberta strategic business plan 2010 to 2013, which ensures that, goal 3, the high quality of Alberta's environment will be sustained; goal 6, Albertans will be independent, and our children will be well cared for; goal 7, Alberta will be a safe place to live, work, and raise a family. Because motion 509 is aligned with our government's priorities and objectives for the health and well-being of children, it should be an easy transition to adopt this charter.

In addition to what our government already has in place, this charter will reaffirm with Albertans as well as the international community that the province of Alberta continues to make children's

health and well-being a top priority. Alberta has always been renowned for being a global leader in innovation and setting the pace for the quality of life for its citizens, and adopting this motion would be a clear continuation of this tradition. Since it has been endorsed by over 80 established organizations, including the United Nations, this further emphasizes our leadership in this area.

Another great opportunity that we gain by accepting this charter is that it places additional emphasis on such areas as childhood obesity, child mortality, injury, and mental health rates, areas of health care that are especially important to our government. Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that issues such as childhood obesity and child mortality rates are an ongoing concern in our province and in our nation. However, since this charter's introduction at the federal level there has been a positive decrease in these areas.

Finally and arguably, Mr. Speaker, it would be yet another tool that this government could use in order to ensure that child and youth well-being in Alberta remains sustainable, accountable, and transparent, values that Albertans have come to expect from this government.

I encourage all members in this Assembly to support Motion 509. Our children have a right to access the best possible care, and it is our responsibility to provide it to them. Government and all Albertans must work in a constructive manner to ensure that our children continue to enjoy the highest quality of life in Canada.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to speaking to Motion 509. First, I want to recognize the appropriateness of this motion coming from a physician, a man of integrity, a man who cares very deeply about the well-being of all Albertans but especially that of children. I also want to give a nod of support to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who so aptly outlined the importance of our House accepting this motion.

I am aware that a motion is basically a call for a direction. A motion suggests action but doesn't actually require action to be taken. A case in point: when this House unanimously accepted a motion that I put forward in terms of calling for a unified family court, with the help of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright changing that motion to calling for a unified family court process, there was unanimous agreement in the House that this is a direction that we should be pursuing. Unfortunately, that was the last we heard of it. I'm hoping that this will not be the case for Motion 509. For a motion to proceed to action, we will need a government commitment for a timeline and a funding commitment to ensure that the five principles that are enshrined in the goals statements include universality, without financial burden, barrier-free access, measurement and monitoring, and safe and secure communities.

A recent Stats Canada figure indicated that the number of children in Alberta living below the poverty line is approximately 78,000. We cannot deal with children's needs unless we first start to recognize the problems associated with poverty. We also in dealing with children's needs need to recognize such issues as child care, such issues as investing in their education. This government has yet to fulfill its requirements for the 2003 Learning Commission. It agreed seven years ago that it would be important to establish funding for full-day kindergarten. The government agreed back in 2003 that it would be important to establish half-day junior kindergarten.

When we compare our child care system or the support we provide for parents who choose to stay at home, for example to that of Quebec, we are so far behind in terms of providing support for families and providing support for children. We have to go beyond

the well-intentioned motherhood of this statement and enact it. There's no point in us patting ourselves on the shoulders and backs, saying: yes, we as an Assembly unanimously endorse this motion. We have a duty as elected representatives of our constituents to translate direction into action. That is extremely important to me.

5:10

We have other examples that this government was very reluctant and late in agreeing to. For example, there was the United Nations universal charter on the rights of children. Now, this government's reason for not endorsing it to the extent other provinces did was that, well, this was a federal matter, that the UN is talking about countries as opposed to provinces. However, that did not prevent other provinces from recognizing universal rights of the child.

I cannot imagine this motion not being accepted. But, again, the call to action is why I'm standing up today. Today in question period, for example, I talked about special-needs children and their needs not being met in this particular province. When I asked the hon. Education minister the question about "Well, now that coding is gone, what is it going to be replaced with so that we can be sure to recognize children's needs and then provide the necessary support to see that those needs are met?" the hon. minister had a very good observation. He said: well, all children are special. I agree with the idea that all children are special. I've devoted over half my life to advocating on behalf of children, 34 years in the classroom, and I'm particularly proud of being a grandparent the last six years.

Advocacy for children is extremely important, but again action is required. If we simply agree to the niceties, the necessities of Motion 509 but fail to act upon them, to bring them into the reality of our Alberta circumstance, where, despite being Canada's wealthiest province, we have the highest dropout rate in high school, we have the lowest postsecondary participation in the nation, we have the highest rates of suicide, the highest rates of divorce – these are not enviable statistics. Therefore, if we take Motion 509 first in accepting it as a direction but then actually put timelines to it and we say, for example, as was discussed in our deliberations over minimum wage, that we go forward with a poverty reduction strategy that takes into account the needs of families, then we'll have gone beyond just providing a nod, and we'll actually get to the point where we need to be for providing a direct action.

The previous bill that was debated was about sustainability and fiscal responsibility. I've put out two buttons in terms of trying to boil down the children's message to its lowest common denominator. One button for Children and Youth Services says Safe Kids Save Dollars. Another button message, which I tried to put into its most simple form, is Education Equals Economy.

What I'm calling for is the next step. When we as a House unanimously accept the positive directions that are being suggested as being necessary for a developed country with a conscience to implement, then we have to go the next step. I very much appreciate that this has been brought to our attention, but it has to get beyond a suggestion; it has to get to action. I hope this government initiates the action which will see the suggestion realized.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion 509 as sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Essentially, the motion urges the government of Alberta to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter with the goal of improving child and youth health throughout

Canada. The charter would commit Alberta to doing its part in ensuring that Canada becomes a place with a safe and secure environment. Isn't that what all of our children want, a safe and secure place, a place where children and youth can have good health and development, a place where a full range of health resources is available to all the youth in our country?

Mr. Speaker, these are goals that this government has and continues to support. After all, the health and well-being of our youth are critical to the future prosperity of our province. In fact, these goals are supported in the government of Alberta's strategic business plan as well as in business plans for the ministries, including Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Wellness. Furthermore, the recently released report from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health, a foundation for Alberta's health system, recommends the creation of an Alberta patient charter in a newly created Alberta health act. This patient charter would outline the rights and responsibilities of citizens in health care and services.

Mr. Speaker, while many of these goals are already enshrined in government policy, I believe a child and youth health charter could be useful in addressing the unique health challenges facing Alberta's youth. The charter was developed through collaboration between the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada. Together these groups produced a charter to address issues such as childhood obesity and mortality rates as a result of workshops that brought together 40 experts, stakeholders, and other key stakeholders in child health.

The result was a document crafted by physicians who have expert, first-hand knowledge of child and youth health issues. Therefore, I believe the adoption of this charter could help shape even more beneficial and effective government policy on child and youth health in years to come. As such, I offer my support for Motion 509 in the hope that we can continue our efforts to improve the quality of life for our Alberta youth. Mr. Speaker, they deserve no less.

Thank you. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join debate on Motion 509:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter sponsored by the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

I can quite easily support this motion. In fact, I would be very surprised if everybody in this House doesn't support this motion. But as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out a couple of speakers ago, the key here is turning words into action. This is a motion by which, if we pass it here today, the Legislative Assembly will urge the government to adopt a charter as a policy document, and that certainly can lead to action. But I would be very intrigued to hear from government members opposite how much thought they had put into the action that they're prepared to take around this if the motion does pass today.

The Canada child and health youth charter was created in 2007 as a collaborative effort, as the Member for Lethbridge-West pointed out. Its goal is to provide our children across the country the ability to reach their full potential, growing up happy, healthy, confident, and secure, and to ensure that Canadian children are among the healthiest in the world.

5:20

It aims to achieve its goals through some 16 statements catego-

rized into three main headings which dictate that Canada must become:

1. A place with a safe and secure environment.

That means:

- (a) Clean water, air and soil;
 - (b) Protection from injury, exploitation and discrimination; and
 - (c) Healthy family, homes and communities.
2. A place where children and youth can have good health and development:
 - (a) Prenatal and maternal care for the best possible health at birth;
 - (b) Nutrition for proper growth, development and long-term health;
 - (c) Early learning opportunities and high-quality care, [both] at home and in the community;
 - (d) Opportunities and encouragement for physical activity;
 - (e) High-quality primary and secondary education;
 - (f) Affordable and available post-secondary education; and
 - (g) A commitment to social well-being and mental health.
 3. A place where a full range of health resources is available:
 - (a) Basic health care including immunization, drugs, and dental [needs]

because tooth decay is the single biggest health problem for children in our country;

- (b) Mental health care and early help programs for children and youth;
- (c) Timely access to specialty diagnostic and health services;
- (d) Measurement and tracking the health of children and youth;
- (e) Research that focuses on the needs of [our] children and youth; and
- (f) Uninterrupted care as youth move to adult health services and between acute, chronic and community care, as well as between jurisdictions.

That's a big chunk of things that the Canada child and youth health charter promises our children and that it defines as the things that we should be working on for our children, which we would buy into at least as a group of Legislative Assembly people here today if we pass Motion 509. We need to think about what actions we're actually prepared to take to move that forward because if we're not preparing an action plan to follow this or if we don't urge the government to prepare an action plan to follow this or if the government doesn't just go ahead and prepare one on its own, then these are just nice words on paper, on a charter, in *Hansard*, and they don't really, really mean much.

The Canadian child and youth health charter has good intentions, and its goal is to aim to improve the level of care for children in Canada. But it's pretty easy to argue that individually all 16 of the proposed points are already currently being achieved or don't specifically need to be worked toward, and there may be little or no change that comes as a result of this commitment. I'm not suggesting that I'm arguing that, but I'm suggesting that there is a series of easy outs and loopholes here for those who should be developing an action plan around this charter to use it to say, "Well, look, it's in our business plan; we're already doing this over here; we're already doing that" and point to the number of things that are being done without a coherent, cohesive, perhaps holistic approach to all 16 of these points to make sure that we're moving the ball down the field. In order to be effective, a motion like this needs to be accompanied by a plan of what each of the 16 points aims to achieve in Alberta, some sort of action strategy to go along with this charter.

It's also worth noting that the 16 points brought forward here also coincide with a lot of the goals that a poverty reduction strategy might be formed around. As the guy who proposed that we add a recommendation around that at committee when we were putting

forward recommendations on a minimum wage policy in this province, I would suggest that beyond this we do need to look at a poverty reduction strategy in the province of Alberta. This is one of only three jurisdictions in Canada that are not at least working on a poverty reduction strategy at this point.

Fighting poverty requires a strategy that involves co-ordination across all government departments. Many of the goals outlined in this charter are relevant to reducing poverty. Poverty is certainly relevant to reducing child health. This charter, if we adopt it or if we urge that the government adopt it, needs an action plan that involves a lot of co-ordination across government departments as well.

This is an interesting challenge and opportunity that we've presented ourselves here with Motion 509. It think it will pass this House. The challenge is not to get support for a motion like this. It would truly be challenging to vote against a motion like this because you wouldn't look like a good guy if you did. The challenge, though, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure, once we've actually recommended that the government do this, that we follow up as an Assembly, continuing to press the government to develop an action plan that will put these points into real practice on a daily basis for the benefit of our children.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just to close, one of the most frequently mentioned things I hear from my constituents and from people in other parts of Calgary is: what a great city Calgary is to raise a family in, to raise children in. I think that if I lived in Edmonton or Grande Prairie or anywhere else in this province, I would hear much the same thing. It is in principle and by and large it is very, very true, but we're not perfect. The fact that we're not perfect, I think, is part of the reason why we're here, to leave this place a little better than we found it. This charter, I think, has the opportunity, this motion has the opportunity to move us a little bit of the way along those lines. If we develop an action plan, then we'll have even more Calgarians and Edmontonians and people in the rest of Alberta saying: this is the greatest place in the country to raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Motion 509 urging the government to adopt Canada's child and youth health charter in the province of Alberta, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. In Alberta we value the notion that our children are being raised in the best possible environment to flourish in their development. To reach their potential, children and youth need to grow up in a place where they can thrive spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, and intellectually and get high-quality health care when they need it. This charter will be another practice in which our government continues to improve the health and security of our future generations.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main reasons why I support this motion is the fact that it was developed and endorsed by such commendable organizations. The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians are established organizations that bring impressive resumé's to the table in regard to improving the well-being of Canadian children. These physicians provide first-hand knowledge of the issues the document addresses. It is also very impressive that over 80 organizations, including the United Nations, have endorsed this charter as being extremely beneficial to the children of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the principles of this motion are also very significant as they align nicely with our government's goals of achieving a

healthy livelihood for all Alberta children regardless of race, ethnicity, creed, language, gender, physical ability, mental ability, cultural history, or life experience. Along with our government's already solid platform on this issue it will help to build a coalition of children and youth health initiatives that will create our best framework yet in improving our children's well-being.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, once again, I believe that Motion 509 is very valuable in improving child and youth health and development here in Alberta, and I fully support it in this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise like all other members in this Assembly to speak in favour of this motion. As has been outlined already, I would be quite surprised to discover that anybody would not speak in favour of this motion. Part of the reason for that, of course, is where some of our concerns lie, in that we're talking about a charter. But, as is the case often with this government, we seem to have a new trend towards overusing that particular language, talking about a charter but then putting a little asterisk at the bottom of it saying that it's not a legally enforceable document; rather, it's just a statement of high-minded principles.

I think we can all agree to sign on to an unenforceable statement of high-minded principles, but the concern then is: if we're going to talk the talk, are we ensuring that what we're really doing is trying to get credit for walking the walk when that's not what we're doing? Certainly, my observation over the last two and a half years is that when it comes to promoting children's health, this government has not walked the walk. There have been critical decision-making points in the last two and a half years where they have made the wrong decision, and they have not made a decision that would ensure the greatest and best outcome for the health of children in the province of Alberta.

5:30

There are, of course, a lot of areas where we can identify that that's the case. I could be here for much longer than the few minutes that I have allocated to me to speak about this. I mean, in the last two years we have cut funding to aboriginal suicide prevention programs. We've embarked upon a wholesale review and revision of special-needs education in our education system, which I am quite convinced is going to lead to tremendous hardship and lack of opportunity for special-needs students.

We have at a variety of different times had the opportunity to look at income rates for families that are currently in poverty who have children. Whether that's with respect to the minimum wage issue, whether that's with respect to income replacement and income support programs, whether that's with respect to AISH, in all those cases we set those amounts at a level that is well, well below the poverty line. Of course, the children of those families live in poverty, so of course, as we know, that results in a deterioration in the health of those children.

In 2000 the federal government considered an antipoverty program, and several of the parties signed on to that antipoverty program. One of the elements of that antipoverty program was that we need to ensure that we have income for families regardless of the source and regardless of the rationale for those families having income, whether it be earned income or pension income or program income or whatever, but that that income not drop below the low-income cut-off measures. That was something that was signed on to by the majority of parliamentarians in, I believe, 2009, yet clearly that is not a set of principles that we've adopted here in Alberta. We

continue to have one of the lowest minimum wage rates in the country, and we continue to have a scheme of user fees that very negatively affect those low-income families, whose children are most impacted by those kinds of programs. Unfortunately, in our province it means they're impacted negatively.

We have a profound lack of mental health services in this province, something that has been identified repeatedly to this government and something about which they have done absolutely nothing in the last two years.

We earlier today talked about the fact that we have addictions treatment programs, which the government spends no time monitoring or regulating or trying to improve the quality of. We've done absolutely nothing about those children who are most at risk, who suffer from problems that have the most profound impact on their health outcomes.

We have refused as a province to consider moving towards a comprehensive child care program. Child care is so fundamental to these issues. We know – the research is incontrovertible – that the better your child care program, your public, high-quality, accessible child care program in your jurisdiction, the better the health of those children, the better the education of those children, and the better the income of those children 10 or 15 years later. It is the single most effective tool to eliminate and eradicate poverty and to generally increase the well-being of everybody in society, whether rich or poor, yet it's something that this government repeatedly rejects.

We have, you know, half-day kindergarten when we've had a Learning Commission recommendation that's six years old now saying that we need to increase educational opportunities for our children, and we need to have full-day kindergarten. We don't have that yet.

We have a patchwork – well, I don't even think I can call it a patchwork because that implies more school lunches than we actually have. We have more of a scattering of school lunch dots, shall we say, across the province. In most cases we don't have a comprehensive school lunch program. We have kids across the province going to school hungry. The Minister of Education talks about: aren't we lucky in certain schools that certain principals stop by Costco on the way to school in the morning to see if they have any extra food that they're not going to put on the shelves that day, and maybe they'll donate it, and that principal can take it to the school, and isn't it great that we have such great periodic volunteers in our system? Well, that's not how you get healthy, well-fed children to school every morning, let me tell you. It's quite ridiculous that the Minister of Education would even talk about such a thing. I mean, we have all of these problems that exist within our system that are not actually moving toward supporting any of the goals in this charter, that we're being asked to vote on today.

One of the fundamental components of this charter is the notion of ensuring that children have no barrier to pharmaceutical care and drugs regardless of their income. But we know that that absolutely doesn't exist in the province of Alberta right now, that many families simply forgo getting prescription drug treatment for their children because they can't afford it.

We know that right now children who leave their home because of abusive or problematic situations, who are 14, 15, 16, who want to try and stay in school, have to, as a result of systems put in place by this government, couch surf for three to four months before they get any kind of income support from this government. That's the system that this government has put in.

We know that there are a lot of things that are not actually supporting these goals and which, in fact, confound the goals of this charter. As much as I think it will be wonderful that members of this Assembly vote to support this charter, I think the real key is that in

so doing, they actually make some element of a commitment to bringing about the objectives which are reflected in the charter, because right now there's very, very little that the government does that is really, truly focused on bringing about those objectives. I wouldn't want to see us all pat ourselves on the back for signing a document which is unenforceable and effectively meaningless, particularly in the face of the government's record at this point.

My hope is that by voting in favour of it, we might actually see the government change their position on any one of the many programs I've just identified. With that optimistic hope in mind, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening to the debate. It's pretty much what I would have expected. I want to make some comments and then take a bit of a different tack. I notice this is a charter. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing it forward. The term "charter" is a bit misleading because "charter" suggests, to Canadians at least, something that's legally enforceable, that has legal standing. This does not, and that disappoints me. It's a bit like the Alberta health charter, or patients' charter of rights or whatever it's going to be called. It's not likely to have any meaning.

I've listened to some good comments: the Member for Calgary-Currie talking about poverty reduction and the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Calgary-Currie talking about the need for action and resources and commitment. I think that was reinforced by the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

I noticed in here, Mr. Speaker, in this proposed charter of child and youth health, a reference to child nutrition. I'll just quote from the charter because this got me thinking of it. The charter commits to "a place where children and youth can have good health and development," including "nutrition for proper growth, development and long-term health."

Now, at first I thought, you know, this is a good thing. This is refreshing. It's a sign that we're advancing when a member of the government caucus brings forward a proposal to support a charter with that statement in it because, Mr. Speaker, you and many members of this Assembly will know that I have fought in here repeatedly over several years for the Alberta government to come forward with some funding for hungry children in Alberta.

People in this province, certainly in this Assembly, don't seem to realize that every day in Alberta, one of the wealthiest jurisdictions on the planet, thousands of kids sit in classrooms hungry through no fault of their own, and this government alone among provincial governments doesn't provide any specific funding to address that problem. I've raised that over the years repeatedly here. I've had heated exchanges with members of the cabinet. I've brought in kids. We've fed them at the Annex and brought them in here and introduced them and challenged the government to act. Over and over it's failed to act and lets the situation continue where in such a wealthy province so many children go hungry through no fault of their own.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, that then got me to thinking about the broader track record of this Assembly and of this province and, indeed, of this country on how we treat children. I know that for many years it was the case that this government refused to sign the UN charter on the rights of the child, and I'm not sure that it has even done that as of today. In my mind, a great embarrassment as an Albertan and as a

Canadian that we would have a government that deliberately refuses to sign something as fundamental as the rights of the child. Then I try to square that position with this Motion 509, that has come forward from a government backbencher, and frankly I can't square it. I'm not sure. Maybe one of the government members can advise me whether Alberta has yet signed that UN charter on the rights of the child or not. I don't believe it has. I stand to be corrected.

Not just to pick on this government, I remember years ago – and, Mr. Speaker, I'm thinking it might have been 20 years ago – that the parliaments of Canada came together in an all-party motion to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Now, I may have the details incorrect, but I believe that at the beginning of the 1990s the Parliament of Canada made a commitment to end child poverty in this country by the year 2000. You know what? We never came close. In fact, the ink on those commitments was barely dry before the excuses and the deferrals and the backpedalling began.

We have a county where child poverty is all too common. The Member for Calgary-Currie talked about what a great city Calgary is, and it is, as long as you have some money. I'm still struck by the very convincing evidence brought forward by, of all sources, the TD Bank that not only does Calgary have the highest percentage of high-income people of any major city in Canada; it has the highest percentage of low-income people as well. Child poverty exists by the thousands in a city as wealthy as Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, as much as I can personally get excited and support this charter, I have to tell you that I'm reluctant to support it. I'm reluctant to support it because I'm reluctant to participate in hypocrisy. I think that's the kind of exercise that this Assembly is embarking on. We're full of fine words, we're full of good intentions, but we can't even find the money to feed hungry kids in our own schools. Come on, people. Where do you get the nerve to take a stand like this, to stand here in this Assembly talking about how wonderful this charter is, how much it means to you as a member from Lethbridge or wherever, yet stand aside when there is a call to provide money for school hunger programs and do nothing? What could be more hypocritical?

I don't want a specifically pick on the Member for Lethbridge-West. I think it's true of this government generally and perhaps some members of some of the opposition parties as well. I'm specifically thinking of the Wildrose Alliance. I've had conversations with one of their members who thinks that it's not the government's business to worry about hungry kids. Well, I think it is, and I stand here very uneasy about supporting something that I know is little more than an empty exercise in rhetoric and a bit of grandstanding hypocrisy. I'd rather at least be honest and vote the thing down because this government is not going to do a darn thing about it.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said here a number of times that if we don't have the resources, that if we don't put some money and muscle and commitment behind this charter, nothing is going to happen. I think it's pretty clear that that's the intention of this

government, to sail this through, to go out tomorrow, give out the news releases, pat themselves on the back, "Oh, aren't we good citizens; we voted for this charter" and then walk away from the challenges. I predict that's what's going to happen. I hope all the members of this Assembly prove me wrong.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

I'll call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it was my privilege on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I would like to thank all my colleagues who participated in the debate on this motion. I'd like to conclude by making a few more remarks and observations.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring the healthy well-being of our children is one of the greatest challenges facing not only this government but governments right across Canada. As my hon. colleagues and I have discussed today, the government is certainly providing support to facilitate child development and deal with the challenge of improving its standards of life for all of Alberta's children. However, there can always be improvement when this issue is our future generations. I strongly believe that a key improvement we can make is to adopt Canada's child and youth health charter. Along with our already sound platform to sustain children's healthy development, the addition of this charter will further demonstrate our government's commitment to child and youth health. It is aligned quite well with our government's priorities, which will make adjustments and modifications to our current system a very smooth process.

Also, this motion will ensure improvements in areas of child health that may need more focus. Mr. Speaker, this can be yet another area in which Alberta excels past other jurisdictions and serves as a leading example for child well-being in Canada and, indeed, around the world. Our children deserve the best possible quality of life, and once again our government will do whatever is necessary to make that happen.

I would again like to thank all hon. colleagues for debating this motion in the Assembly today and urge all members to support the motion. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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