



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

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Issue 44

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

### The 27th Legislature

#### Third Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, the Canadian Country Music Association male artist 2010 recipient, winner of the Country Music Television video of the year, album of the year winner as well as winner of the humanitarian of the year award, Mr. Gord Bamford, an Albertan, will lead us in the singing of our national anthem today.

**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. [Applause]

**The Speaker:** Mr. Bamford, I know that you're used to a six-song set, but today that's where we're going to say thank you. Again, thank you for joining us today.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce four individuals today. My first guest has already been introduced personally to many of you today. We were privileged to have him sing our national anthem. I'll be doing a private member's statement a little while later. Now I would like Mr. Gord Bamford, the CCMA 2010 male vocalist of the year recipient, and his manager, Kelly Resler, to rise and receive the official warm welcome of this Assembly. Kelly is in the members' gallery. Stand up, please, Kelly and Gord.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to introduce to you and through you my next guest, who is the first elected mayor of Lacombe, the newest city in Alberta. Steve Christie is truly community oriented. He has served on my constituency board for four years, two years as president. He has been on Lacombe council for the last six years and has served on the Lacombe volunteer fire department for over 11 years. I'm looking forward to a great working relationship with Mayor Christie and an exciting future for the city of Lacombe. He has brought with him the acting CAO of the city of Lacombe, Mr. Michael Minchin. I know that Michael's vast knowledge of municipal issues as well as his calm persona are a huge asset to Mayor Christie and the rest of council. Mayor Christie and Michael, who is in the members' gallery, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as well.

## Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure to be here to introduce some very, very special guests – where are they? – up in the gallery who are here from Julia Kiniski school. They're joined by their teacher group leader, Mrs. Susan Skillings. They represent a growing number of interested people who are here to watch and observe democracy in action. I would ask that all of our guests from Julia Kiniski school please stand and receive the warm ovation of the House. Welcome. Thank you for being here.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I met with the students that are in our gallery from St. Theresa school. They are knowledgeable. They're eager. They'll be here through the question period. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Earle and Ms McKinney, by parent helpers Mrs. O'Connor, Mrs. Hale, and Mrs. Szott. Fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly, please congratulate St. Theresa school for showing the initiative to come in today. Students, please rise.

**The Speaker:** Do you have another one?

**Ms Evans:** Yes, I do have, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce Russ and Grace Davidson, who are constituents of mine and residents in Sherwood Park. They've lived there for the last 39 years. Their combined residency in Alberta is 70-plus years. They have two sons diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Tim recently obtained the CCSVI treatment in Mexico, and his life and quality of life have improved considerably. They are hopeful that the minister's announced review of this type of treatment will result in their capacity to see that for their other son. Both sides of the family are here, daughter and daughter-in-law as well. Colleagues, will you please welcome Russ and Grace Davidson to our Legislature.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 visitors who are joining us in the public gallery. To say "students" isn't quite correct, and I'll explain that. They are attending the Bredin Institute in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. These are international pharmacy bridging program students. They are international pharmacy graduates, and they are working towards their accreditation or licences. They are accompanied today by their group leader, Ms Cynthia Lambertson-Poon. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the congratulations and welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly some good folks from my constituency and one from Edmonton. Miss Vickie Jackson and Mrs. Kimberly Armstrong went to India to have the CCSVI operation. While Vickie has shown tremendous progress and success and is able to return to a quality of life that she had only dreamed of months ago, Kimberly is starting

to move backwards. She has shown tremendous progress for two or three months and now finds herself in desperate need of the Doppler ultrasound. They find it frustrating that while they were very willing to go and receive the operation in India, they can't have the follow-up service that would seem to make sense as we put together the data that we need so that we can all tackle MS with a responsible go-forward so that they and their children or grandchildren won't be subject to the same debilitating disease it's become.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask Vickie Jackson, Kimberly Armstrong, and friend Larry Walton to please stand and accept the warm reception of the House.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 members of the Smoky Lake ladies' health care auxiliary, led by their president, Diana Hryniv. These hard-working and dedicated ladies are committed to helping rural Albertans by assisting and working in conjunction with medical facilities in Smoky Lake. It's a real privilege to have them visit us here today at the Legislature. I'd ask them to rise and my colleagues to give them the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of our Assembly a member of the New South Wales Attorney General's department, Ms Michelle Browning. Ms Browning is a senior guardian with that department and is here to meet with our government officials on the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, which came into force last October.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, I'm very proud of this groundbreaking legislation, and I am pleased to say that it continues to attract international attention. Ms Browning received the Churchill fellowship to visit Canadian jurisdictions to learn about new models to bring back to Australia. I understand she's particularly interested in the supportive decision-making options available in the AGTA. Ms Browning will be meeting with officials in my department as well as with Alberta Justice and Alberta Health Services while she's here and with advocacy organizations such as the Alberta Association for Community Living. She is joined by Ms Brenda Lee Doyle, director of the office of the public guardian. They are both in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three very special individuals that have had and still have a close place in my life. The first one is my sister-in-law Ghislaine Muise. She is a long-term nurse here in Edmonton. The second one, as well another sister-in-law, Paulette Fortin, who has recently retired, has worked her full career with Telus. For both of them it's their very first time in the Alberta Legislature. They're both accompanied by my wife, Angeline. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce two fine Edmontonians who are with us today in the members' gallery. Mr. Gordon Gordey has contributed 33 years of public service in arts, culture, and human rights in our province, serving with the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit. Also, as CEO of Shumka his 40-year experience as a dancer, writer, choreographer, and stage director was integral in developing Shumka's management and artistic goals. Also with him is his better half, his wife, Cathy Gordey, who currently works for research services at the University of Alberta. Prior to moving to the U of A, however, Cathy was a manager of various portfolios for the government of Alberta. I would like them both to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce to you today, and they are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask Ken and Ray to stand. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ken Babey and Ray "Rocky" Herrington. Ken is now in his 24th season as the SAIT Trojans' men's hockey coach. He is the winningest coach in Canadian postsecondary men's hockey league play. The team has won four consecutive titles, which is a tie for the league record. They are currently in their drive for five, and again they're at the top of the league's standings. Along with being head coach of the SAIT Trojans, Ken has been the athletic director at SAIT Polytechnic since 1997.

Ray Herrington is the team manager of the SAIT Trojans. Perhaps his interest in athletics comes from his extensive boxing background. A former Alberta Golden Gloves champion in '62-63, Canadian boxing champion in '63, and Canadian army boxing champion in '63-64, he also went to the Olympic trials for boxing in '64. He was inducted into the Canadian armed forces' sports hall of fame in 1993 and the SAIT wall of distinction in 1998. We affectionately call him Canvasback. Rocky is also the president of the Calgary Booster Club and has operated various fundraising projects, including social gatherings at Rocky's penalty box lounge. All proceeds from these projects have been donated back to the Trojans hockey team. They are rising, so I'll ask you to give them the warm traditional applause of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a constituent of mine, Miss Amy Prins. Amy is a student at NAIT in Edmonton, and she will be spending some time with me today and tomorrow learning about my role as an MLA. Amy is an incredibly bright young student, and I hope that she will enjoy her opportunity to watch question period and to sit in on some meetings with me. Amy is seated in the members' gallery. I'll ask Amy to rise, and let's all give her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature guests from the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble of Edmonton. There are five representatives visiting us today at the

Alberta Legislature who, along with their organization, were instrumental in hosting the 33rd annual western Canadian Croatian folklore festival in Edmonton earlier this year, which I will highlight in a member's statement today. I'd like to welcome the following guests, who are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names. We have with us today Doris Beljan, the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble president; Tanja Pavelić, secretary for the Domagoj ensemble; Slavka Milicević, treasurer for the ensemble; Zdenka Stipin, who is one of the Domagoj dance instructors; and Jozo Arar, a member of the Domagoj alumni association. You will notice that both Jozo and Zdenka are wearing the national costume of Dalmatia and the coast city of Dubrovnik. I would now ask that we all provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Joginder Dhillon, who I consider not only a friend but an older brother, and I want to stress the older part. He was an exceptional supporter of mine in the 2004 and 2000 elections, and I cannot overstate what a pleasure it has been to have him on my side. With him today is his son, Mr. Harvir Dhillon, who I am pleased to report is studying hard to be a doctor and will soon be helping to ease some of the pressures in our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, it is because of wonderful supporters like the Dhillons that I have the honour to represent the constituency of Calgary-McCall and to fight for very important issues facing not only Calgary-McCall but the whole of Calgary, issues such as the airport tunnel that, for the kind information of the Minister of Transportation, is called the airport underpass now, sir. I would ask my guests to rise now, and I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a gentleman in the gallery who many years ago spent a lot of time in this building: Mr. Bob Giffin, who is the former executive director of the office of the Premier. In fact, it was Mr. Giffin that hired me to the role as press secretary back in 1980. I'd ask Bob to stand and be recognized by the House.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you a Swedish exchange student who is here on a Rotary exchange, Mr. Jonathan Arvidsson. Jonathan is currently attending Strathcona high school and is extremely interested in politics, so he came down to the Assembly to see how politics works. Jonathan is joined today by Fern and Danie Hardie, who are residents of my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I've been advised that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit wishes to present a ministerial statement today. We will surely come up against Standing Order 7(1), which states: "At 1:50 p.m., Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes" shall commence. So in order to deal with this, we're going to have to deal with unanimous consent. Our tradition is that if I recognize the minister, under our rules a

spokesperson from the Official Opposition can automatically have a chance to respond, and then we know that the request will be made for unanimous consent to have additional speakers.

We've arrived at this point, but I started this before the clock hit 1:50 p.m., so I will ask for unanimous consent for us to proceed with ministerial statements at this time. If so, we will deal with the two for sure, and then I'll have to ask the question again for additional ones. The question period will hence then be delayed by that amount of minutes. Is any member opposed to recognition being provided to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to participate in a ministerial statement? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

## 1:50 Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

### Holodomor Memorial Day

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who has travelled the length and breadth of Alberta has no doubt been struck by the wealth of our agricultural lands. There are crops of all types, but more than any other crop we see fields of wheat. Perhaps we forget that these fields of wheat are fields of life, a living example of our great blessings in this land. We are so used to the presence of the stalks of gold that it takes a considerable effort to imagine them being taken away. Imagine an Alberta without wheat, without crops of any kind. It doesn't seem reasonable. Unfortunately, history has all too many examples of the unreasonable and the unimaginable becoming horrifying reality.

In November 2008 this House unanimously passed the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act. The act commemorates one of history's darkest hours: the famine that ravaged the population of Soviet Ukraine between 1932 and 1933. This famine wasn't due to a cruel trick of fate or an aberration of the weather. It wasn't an act of God; it was an act of men. It was Joseph Stalin's totalitarian regime that pursued this murderous policy. This tragedy is known as Holodomor, which in Ukraine means extermination by means of starvation. Under Stalin's direction officials took the actions that brought misery and death to between 6 million and 7 million men, women, and children. The goal was to force Ukrainians to adopt collective farming practices and, ultimately, to destroy Ukrainian nationalism. It was a barbaric policy. People had to fill government quotas that left them with nothing to eat for themselves. Those who refused saw their crops confiscated and even their valuable seed grain taken away. Men, women, and children were executed for keeping so much as a handful of grain.

One Alberta survivor of the Holodomor, Olga Zazula, spoke to the *Calgary Herald* in 2008. She relived her grief as she spoke of losing her 5-year-old brother to the famine. Her father, who was head of his village, was in prison one day and was never seen again. She and her family were forced to eat grass, leaves, and tree bark. A neighbour even considered eating a dead rat. One chilling observation by a Soviet author was that before they died, people often lost their senses and ceased to become human beings.

The Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act recognizes the famine as an act of genocide. The memorial act designates the fourth Saturday of each November as Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day. It falls on November 27 this year. In Alberta our Ukrainian community will gather to mark this significant day and remember and honour the victims of the tragedy. I urge all Albertans to recognize this important day and, in doing so,

to reflect on our individual and communal roles in the fight against racial, religious, and other forms of hatred.

On Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day we are reminded of our roles in resisting and overcoming injustice, intolerance, and indifference. We must do this locally and globally. We must never forget our responsibility to achieve a common goal of building societies which effectively protect and truly value human rights. We must never forget that our words and our actions can make the difference between justice and injustice, between joy and sorrow. We must never forget, Mr. Speaker, that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. This is how we can truly honour the victims of this genocide.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with sadness that I rise on behalf of the Official Opposition. I certainly had the privilege earlier, at noontime, to witness the hon. Premier, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, and various other members of this Assembly pay respects to the Ukrainian community and to remember the horror that occurred in 1932 and 1933.

It's incredible to live in this province and to think that in parts of the Ukraine, with year after year of bountiful crops, the citizens, the farmers who grew them were restricted and limited. Those crops went to the Soviets; they did not stay behind for the farmers, not even a bit of seed to plant a crop the following year. We certainly have to remember. How we can truly honour the victims of this genocide is to ensure that food is never used again as a political or a military weapon. We must never allow food or the restriction or limitation of a food supply to be used for any means. Never should this occur again.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, both the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood have requested that they be permitted to speak. We need unanimous consent of the House. If any members oppose, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We stand here today joined as a community of Albertans who remember the victims of Holodomor and keep their memories alive through this remembrance.

When Ukraine was declared independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, little was known about Holodomor. Slowly stories emerged. We know that during that period of time tremendous suffering occurred: 6 million to 7 million men, women, and children died due to starvation. This was another horrendous act of genocide. Can you imagine helping to harvest the crops, the wheat, the grain and not being allowed to keep any of it? Barbaric regulations and quotas were put in place which enabled the government to confiscate the land and the produce from those who produced it. Imagine seeing your loved ones, your family, your friends, and your neighbours literally starving to death in front of you and being unable to do anything about it because you are too weak yourself. Mr. Speaker, this is something that we can't imagine anymore than to be burned. It's something that cannot be imagined by those who have not experienced it.

It is because of events like these that we keep the memories alive.

It is because of people like you, the Ukrainian people, both the survivors and the descendants, who are brave enough to speak out and tell the stories of the famine, that we are here today. It is because of your refusal to forget dear loved ones who died unjustly that we remember who we honour. They, like you, are now feeling free to share their story. You will tell the story for the ones that could not pass it on themselves, and we will listen.

I remember the quote from Socrates: there is only one good, knowledge; and one evil, ignorance. We must never forget that our words and our actions can make the difference between justice and injustice, between joy and sorrow. Our laws must protect our life, our freedom, and our property. Anything less is unacceptable. They are always passed off by tyrants as good for the whole. We must protect the individual before we can protect the whole of society. We must never forget. This is how we can truly honour the victims of Holodomor.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Assembly. Today we mark Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day, taking place this weekend. The great loss and suffering that took place nearly 80 years ago, when millions of people in Ukraine were subjected to genocide, is one of the blackest calamities in our history. This is an important and sober commemoration for the many Albertans who are part of the Ukrainian community. On behalf of the NDP opposition and all New Democrats I express my sorrow at this terrible event.

It is not just an historic event in Ukrainian history. All of us need to see it as a powerful reminder of the importance of each of us always being prepared to speak up and defend human rights whenever they are under attack. What we permit to happen to others, no matter where they are, increases the danger for all of us. This memorial of a horrible time in modern history is a call to us to defend democratic principles and human rights wherever and whenever they are threatened.

I extend my sympathies to all those who suffered in Holodomor and to the many family members who lost loved ones. As we remember, we recommit to working for a just world. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Emergency Medical Services

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier took the unprecedented step of updating his blog on Sunday night so that he could read a scripted, rehearsed statement scolding Albertans about theatrics. Is the Premier saying that the thousands of Albertans writing letters to the editor, calling MLAs' offices, even the emergency debate here in the Legislature and concerns about emergency care is theatrics?

2:00

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wasn't blaming Albertans. Albertans are continuing to tell us that health care is important to them and that they want to see improvements. Right now everyone involved for a period of time was looking at each other and maybe pointing blame. What I've said is: look, the time has come. There



was a very good meeting of health care professionals on Friday that talked about a good plan to be put in place, and I'm looking forward to the implementation of that plan.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier, then, saying that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is not really concerned about health care but is engaged in theatrics?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we're all concerned about health care together with all Canadians. This is a serious issue across the country, and that's why we'll continue here as a government to show leadership, to keep improving the system. We've already put more money in. We've opened up more continuing care beds, and we'll continue on with the plan.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans, including health professionals, are feeling a chill in the air. Will the Premier instruct Alberta Health Services to encourage health professionals to speak out with their ideas on how to make this system work?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, 100 or so health care professionals met last Friday. They put their heads together with the Alberta Health Services Board and have come up with, I believe, a very, very good plan. Now it's time to implement that plan and get on with it. That's what we're going to be doing.

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

#### Accountability in Health System Governance

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been consistently failing Alberta's health care system. This gross, misguided experiment in creating one health region has failed. Its implementation has been disastrous, and sadly it has now become a tragic and rather bitter joke. To the Premier: will the Premier, who launched this experiment, bring it to an end through an orderly dismantling of Alberta Health Services?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, the reason we put all of the regions into one was to consolidate the operations – all the human resource departments, all of the auditing departments, the dozen or so CEOs that were scattered across the province – and to take those savings and put them into front-line services. That was roughly about \$800 million. That's over and above the 6 per cent that we gave health care for this year and will continue for the next three years, followed by 4 and a half per cent for the next few years.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, whether he is simply a political scapegoat or not, Stephen Duckett has lost the confidence and respect of the health professionals in the system and is no longer fit to hold the title of CEO. Will the Premier order the CEO terminated?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, obviously, the party opposite has changed their mind. The colleague sitting next to the leader said at some point that I or the government or whoever was purposely setting up the CEO. Now all of a sudden they changed their mind over the weekend and want him removed. All I can say is that we'll continue to have very serious heart-to-heart discussions with the Alberta Health Services Board. It's something that Albertans certainly don't appreciate, and we've certainly heard from Albertans today and over the weekend.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier not realize that by failing to hold Stephen Duckett accountable for the disrespect he's shown to Albertans, he approves of an action that insulted every single Albertan?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Dr. Duckett is an employee of the Alberta Health Services Board, and I'm sure that the board, as we speak, is looking at all of the information that's coming forward and will be making a decision. Again, following such intense meetings, good ideas flowing from the 100 or so professionals that met, Dr. Eagle's plan to communicate to all Albertans: that took second fiddle to the comments that were made, unfortunately, by the CEO.

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

#### Emergency Medical Services

*(continued)*

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AMA president's letter released last Friday reads, "The delivery of health care in Alberta can continue to lurch from crisis to crisis to crisis, along with a superficial diagnosis and a patchwork of short-term 'solutions'." To the Premier: as part of a long-term solution to the ER crisis will the Premier appoint an emergency task force so that the real experts can get started on cleaning up the mess this Premier has created?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, these were health care professionals that got together on Friday and came up with a comprehensive plan, and now it's up to health care providers and the AHS Board to implement that plan. I would suggest that the sooner we get going on it, the better. I know that they're going to communicate the plan to all of the hospitals and get feedback so that they can implement it efficiently. Of course, a big part of that is to increase more community-based programs and also increase the number of continuing care beds.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, we're calling for a task force because the Alberta Health Services Board has clearly shown itself inadequate to the task. We need a long-term task force to merge into a regional delivery system. Does the Premier accuse the president of the AMA of contributing to theatrics because he joined other Albertans in speaking the truth about this failed experiment?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again more chatter, more talk, more loss of focus on what the plan is and again looking and pointing fingers at each other. I've talked to the president of the AMA. He was very supportive of the plan. He thought it was a good plan to move forward. It's a first step. We've got to reduce the number of people that are accessing health through the emergency room, so personal care networks are going to be a huge component of that, and there are other solutions that AHS will announce very shortly.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, the president of the AMA also stated in his letter that "the situation in emergency departments . . . is a symptom of a health care system in distress." Will the Premier acknowledge that Alberta Health Services has been a colossal mistake and commit to an orderly transition to a system that has local decision-making, guided by the professionals working in the system?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, professionals do work in the system. These are the individuals that are delivering the solutions to many of the problems. But I can tell you that if he thinks we're going to go

back to 300 hospital boards and 300 administrations, we're not. We're going to have people responsible in every hospital for the delivery and people accountable to the public. But to go back to 300 boards and add another \$800 million worth of expenses and take it out of front-line service?

#### Member Suspension from PC Caucus

**Mr. Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are appalled at this government. What an absolute disgrace this has been, kicking your own emergency room doctor out of caucus right during an emergency room crisis. Shameful. And for what? Sticking up for the sick and the suffering and people dying in our emergency rooms. This Premier should be ashamed of himself. To the Premier: will you immediately apologize for this ridiculous decision that was made today? Absolutely shameful, sir.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I think a very good example of theatrics.

In fact, every hour \$300 million is invested in health care in this province. That will continue to grow with the program growth. But every time we just take time to point fingers at each other and take away from the progress that's being made – we have health care professionals ready to go, and I'm there to work with them together with our government.

**Mr. Anderson:** Not good enough, Mr. Speaker.

Given that this Premier has kicked the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to the curb for speaking out for sick seniors and now the same Premier kicks out an ER doc for speaking out for the sick and suffering Albertans in our emergency rooms, does this Premier give a tinker's damn about anything other than himself and getting his party back into power in 12 months? It ain't going to work.

**Mr. Stelmach:** That's quite an emotional statement, but it hasn't moved the plan ahead, and that's my focus here, to work with everyone to move the plan that was brought together by health care professionals last week. You know, we can point fingers at each other again and call each other names. What was done has been done. I can't retract what the CEO said. I can't retract what has been said before. All I know is that there is a plan in place; let's get on with it.

2:10

**Mr. Anderson:** You should be apologizing to every single Albertan and, certainly, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Given that we live in a democracy that values free speech or is supposed to value free speech and is based on an MLA being able to represent his constituents with everything that he has, how can this Premier sit there and spit in the face of democracy, of free speech, and of an MLA representing and defending the people of Alberta to the best of his ability? How low will you go, Premier? This is absolutely shameful. You should apologize.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again we can talk about the decision that was reached today, but there is nothing holding any member back from talking about how to improve the health care system. The hon. member presented his point of view. Some of that has been incorporated in the plan, and that plan will be delivered by the health care professionals of this province.

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

#### Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has just suspended his own parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness for speaking up against this government's disastrous handling of the emergency room crisis. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is a courageous MLA and health care provider who puts his constituents ahead of loyalty to a secretive and incompetent Tory government. Will the Premier apologize for penalizing the members of his caucus that speak the truth and, instead, finally take responsibility for the entire health care crisis that he has created?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, a similar question as from the first questioner. It's very clear in terms of the plan that was put together over the weekend. We're now in a process of implementing that plan, and we will continue to implement it no matter how much the opposition tries to oppose it and create diversions. First and foremost, let's get on with the plan to ensure that every Albertan has an equitable opportunity in health care to enter the system appropriately within the right amount of time.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier is tired of all the theatrics surrounding health care. To him it's just a soap opera, perhaps called *As the Cookie Crumbles*, but to most Albertans it's a life-or-death issue, and they're glad it's finally getting some public attention. But when a member of the government caucus tries to speak up, he gets kicked out of the PC caucus, just like that. To the Premier: why do you keep trying to sweep the emergency crisis and your job in creating it under the rug? Why are you silencing your own MLAs?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there is a plan that was put together last Friday. We will implement that plan no matter what the opposition tries to throw in front of government or in front of Alberta Health Services. It's very important that that plan is implemented, at least the beginning of it, because there's more to follow the week after and the week after that in terms of relieving the pressures on the emergency rooms. Like I said, it's community-based programs, and it's also creating more spaces for seniors so they have the proper accommodation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much. Well, the Premier seems to think our ER crisis is some sort of stage play. If so, it's a combination of tragedy and farce, Mr. Speaker. The author is sitting in the Premier's chair. Will the Premier admit that the decisions of his government have led directly to this ER crisis and that silencing his own parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness only further undermines morale among front-line health care providers?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, everybody had an opportunity for input. I've listened to input coming from all groups: health care professionals, those that are advocates for health care in the province, people that were in the system, and people that just took the time to call and say, you know, "I had a pleasant experience." There are, obviously, many that haven't, especially waiting in emergency rooms. We're going to resolve the issue. Like I said before, we're going to try and provide equitable service across the province: three new cancer radiation clinics, in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Red Deer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On Friday Alberta Health Services announced ER surge capacity protocols. Ideas may look good on paper, but implementation is everything. My questions will be to the Premier. These changes are to be implemented by next month in an organization that is itself in a management crisis. To the Premier: how are these changes possibly going to be implemented in an organization of 90,000 people in one month?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the plan was entered into by a number of health care professionals, who all had input. Now is the opportunity to disseminate that information to all of the health care providers in the province. That information will go out through the various groups that have responsibility in certain hospitals across the province. We'll also work with the long-term care association, that we continually build more beds and free up acute-care beds in the province. All of those things are part of the overall plan.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody believes this can be done in one month in an organization this size. Alberta Health Services' leadership, hand-picked by this government, is in disarray, but it takes effective leadership to implement these changes. To the Premier: does this government have a plan B when these protocols don't work out?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the plan that health care professionals put together – these are health care providers that came from different corners of the province and spent considerable time putting their ideas forward, looking at them, criticizing each other in terms of, okay, what is good, what is not good in our particular area. They came to agreement, and now is the time to implement it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it seems that Stephen Duckett gets a cookie while the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark gets the boot out of his caucus. Last week this Premier offered support to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, so what has caused the Premier to change his mind?

**Mr. Stelmach:** My support for the member has not changed. I made a commitment to the member that the discussions we had, because they were of a personal nature, will stay personal. That is the promise I made to the member, and I keep my promise.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### **Oil Sands Development Communications Strategy**

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the news today we saw that three federal government departments have been developing a communications strategy to deal with international global warming policies that target Alberta's oil sands. Therefore, my first question is to the Minister of Energy. How is the Alberta government involved in the development of this strategy that Ottawa is working on regarding our resource?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to see, as the member mentioned, that there is some work taking place at the federal level. I think it reassures us because to date the Prime Minister and senior federal ministers have not been proudly talking on the international stage about the responsible oil sands development. I think it's some 500,000 Canadians that work directly or

indirectly in the Canadian petroleum industry, including about 15,000 who fly in and out of this province every week or two from east of the Manitoba-Ontario boundary.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many hard-working and honest Albertans from the energy sector are frustrated with unfounded and unsubstantiated attacks on our oil sands, I'd welcome a better strategy that will yield more informed discussion. Can the minister tell us what level of co-operation he has with his federal counterpart and with the federal government in general on this issue?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, one of the federal cabinet ministers that is advocating on behalf of the oil and gas industry around the world is the federal minister of energy, Mr. Paradis from Quebec. He and I have agreed that we're going to work towards the development of a national clean energy strategy, and that'll begin next summer, when we host the federal-provincial ministers here in Alberta. I'm also happy to say that the ambassador to Washington, who's the former NDP Premier of Manitoba, has been a very strong advocate on behalf of the oil sands, and it's something that other members of this House could probably take some advice from.

**Mr. Johnson:** My last question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Many Canadians seem to feel that only Albertans benefit from the oil sands development. Can the minister tell us the extent of the benefits that our oil sands provide the entire country?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. As I said in my previous answers, some 500,000 Canadians either work directly or indirectly in the oil industry in Alberta, and many of those come from east of the Manitoba-Ontario border, and that's not to mention all of the manufacturing jobs that are associated with the oil sands. As a result of that, the Alberta economy generates in the range of some \$55 billion annually, and that pays for such things as health care, advanced education, and in some cases \$7 daycare across the country.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:20

#### **Provincial Fiscal Deficit**

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning at the fiscal update we learned that the deficit has ballooned to over \$5 billion. The province is expected to take in slightly more than \$34 billion and, of course, spend \$39 billion. My first question is to the minister of finance. The minister has stated that external factors are to blame for Alberta's deficit and that spending is the only thing that the government can control. My question is: where is the savings plan? When can we expect the savings plan from this government?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, it is true that the deficit is now projected to be \$5 billion, not \$4.7 billion, but our actual spending is lower than was projected at budget time if you take away emergency and disaster spending. I'd ask the hon. member opposite: does he not want us to fund emergencies and disasters? Does he want us to take the money back from the flood victims, back from the forest fires, back from the drought victims? Where does he want us to cut the emergency spending?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of finance, with his big spending habits, can't justify disaster relief as the reason why we have a \$5 billion deficit. That's false. It's your mismanagement.

To the President of the Treasury Board. The minister has said that the government is looking at further belt-tightening. I know that last year you showed leadership by finding \$1.5 billion in savings from various ministries. What can the taxpayers expect from your department this year?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the title of our budget last year was Striking the Right Balance. We said at the time that it was a combination of looking where there were opportunities for revenue without raising taxes – and it was on an ongoing basis throughout all the government departments – where we could save money and deliver the services that we need to deliver more efficiently. That isn't done on the one day we deliver the budget. It happens every day that the public service goes to work, looking for better ways to deliver the services that Albertans want more effectively.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of finance. The minister has placed great emphasis on getting value for every dollar spent. We've just heard that. At the same time this government is passing legislation to increase the number of MLAs from 83 to 87, and we've seen an increase in the size of the cabinet since 2008. Could the minister of finance explain how increasing the size of government provides value for money for Alberta taxpayers?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, what I'll explain to the hon. member is that we've actually shrunk the size of government. As I speak today, there are 3,114 fewer employees in the government of Alberta than there were when the recession began. Government is shrinking in Alberta, not growing.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Along the same lines, earlier today government released its second-quarter update, informing Albertans about the province's fiscal situation and forecast for the year ahead, including the fact that Alberta's deficit is now forecast at \$5 billion for this fiscal year, up from \$4.7 billion. My question to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is: would the minister please explain why our deficit has increased? Did we not commit to holding the line on spending?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, as I just finished explaining, in fact we did hold the line on spending. Our increase in the size of the deficit is due to emergency spending: \$534 million for flood, drought, forest fires, and pine beetle. These are emergencies that we can't prevent, but we can help the people that suffer from them. We have held the line. If you hold that emergency spending to the side, our spending actually went down.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how does the government intend to cover the deficit for this year?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, the good news is that in Alberta deficit does not equal debt. Because of the fiscal responsibility shown by

a number of governments leading down to the recession in 2008, we went into this recession with \$18 billion in the sustainability fund. Each of the three deficits to date have been offset by the savings from the sustainability fund. At the end of this budget year we project that there'll still be \$11 billion in the sustainability fund.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Final question to the same minister: given that you mentioned uncertainty in global economic conditions affecting the government's bottom line, is it still realistic to expect that Alberta can be back in the black by 2012-13?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, will it be easy to stay in a balanced budget in 2012? No. Is it realistic? Absolutely, yes. If we hold the line on spending, if our revenue projections are accurate, which we think they are – they're in line with private-sector projections – we will be back in the black in two years. It's not only realistic; it's necessary. It's necessary to ensure that we do not end up running up debt. In Alberta the Premier has stated that he will not leave debt on the backs of the next generation. I support that. Everybody on this side of the aisle supports that, and we're going to hit that target.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

#### School Board Funding

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago at the Alberta School Boards Association MLA breakfast the Minister of Education scolded naughty trustees for uniting with school councils and the Alberta Teachers' Association in opposition to his draconian educational cuts and clawbacks. By initially not honouring the weekly average earnings index, which determined teacher and staff increases, the minister threw a major wrench into budget preparation which lasted until July, forcing boards to redo their budget. To the minister: is the minister's proposal to appoint trustees just the latest punishment for their ongoing opposition to his educational freezes and cuts?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I'd love to answer that question, but I have to start with those rather ridiculous preambles. First of all, there were no draconian cuts in the budget last year to education. In fact, the budget went up. When I talked to school board trustees last fall, I wasn't lecturing them or beating them on the head; I was saying to them that what we had started with them was an intelligent and respectful discussion about how to deal more effectively and efficiently with the resources in the system because resources were tight. Secondly, I said to the school boards in the spring, after the budget, that we would honour our commitment to teachers.

**The Speaker:** I think we're going to get back to this.  
The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Despite at least \$8 billion remaining in the sustainability fund, is the minister planning again on playing the recessionary card to deny much-needed capital spending on new school construction and billions of dollars in accumulated school repairs?

**Mr. Hancock:** As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, when the budget came down last year and it did not budget for the teacher increases that we had committed to, I made it very clear to the boards that we were

still committed to providing them with those resources, and I asked them to budget on that basis. The fact that boards did not do that is not my responsibility. The fact that when we came through with the resources in July, which we said we were going to be doing, forced them to come back in the summer to do some more work on their budgets, is not my problem because I told them very, very clearly up front – and you can even read the *Calgary Herald* article, which said: read between the lines; the government is meeting their commitment.

**Mr. Chase:** I think we just saw a re-enactment of Pontius Pilate washing his hands of the matter.

Does the minister believe that parents, trustees, or teachers would tolerate his further interference in suggesting opening negotiations in the last two years of the five-year labour agreement? What is the minister's word or signature on a contract worth?

**Mr. Hancock:** A signature of this minister of this government is worth every bit. It can be upheld. We stand behind our commitments. We're standing behind our commitments with respect to that contract. But what I have done is asked the ATA and the school boards to come to the table to talk about how we can extend this period of time of the five-year labour peace that we've had so that we can continue to talk about what the importance and value of education is to Albertans, what education looks like as we go forward, and how we can do it better together.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Landowner Private Property Rights

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks there has been a blizzard of misinformation, even fearmongering, that the property rights of Albertans are threatened by recent provincial legislation, including the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does the Alberta Bill of Rights take precedence over all other provincial legislation?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the answer to the question is yes, absolutely. The Bill of Rights takes precedence over other Alberta legislation unless there's something in the legislation that says it does not. In this particular case it includes the Land Stewardship Act. The Bill of Rights absolutely overrides the Land Stewardship Act.

**Mr. Prins:** Again to the same minister: what does it mean when the Alberta Land Stewardship Act says that a regional plan may amend or even extinguish an existing approval?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we need to be clear about this because not only the members of this House but all Albertans need to understand that ALSA, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, cannot and does not take away or extinguish any land title or any mineral right that's held freehold.

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how does the Alberta Land Stewardship Act affect Albertans' rights to compensation?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, this is another thing there's been an awful lot of misunderstanding about. ALSA, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, does not preclude any property rights owner, any Albertan, from receiving fair compensation. As a matter of fact, it guarantees fair compensation under any other act that already has compensation allotment in it. ALSA says that you will be compensated under the other legislation.

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

#### Children in Care

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The children's advocate report is out, and even in its most sanitized form the news is not good. Since 2003 the advocate has been begging the government to do a better job supporting the most vulnerable children in government care, youth with complex needs. Seven years later the advocate tells us that no progress has been made. Why does the Minister of Children and Youth Services continue to ignore the youth in her care, who are the absolute most vulnerable?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the advocate report reaches back eight months to March 2010 and addresses the previous year to that. In the eight-month period we have made significant progress. While I've been here in this ministry I've seen that. The advocate has given us good advice, and the recommendations that are made in the report make good sense about how our programs and policies can be improved and how they can better assist our families. I can assure this member that we are working toward that. I know that the members address complex needs, and we care.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been seven years that the advocate has been asking for this, so another seven months undoubtedly brings no change.

Given that the advocate reports also failure by the ministry to introduce the most basic of protections from the major safety breaches contained within the kinship program and given that the vast majority of the children in the kinship program are aboriginal, why did the minister refuse to act on the recommendations of her own hand-picked panel to provide specialized support to off-reserve aboriginal children and families?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you earlier in the Assembly, what the member is referring to with kinship care is that there is kinship care; there is foster care. It is delivered by our child and family services authorities off reserve and by our delegated First Nations agencies on reserve. I am meeting once again with the delegated First Nations agencies this week because they have asked to be the ones to formulate the model that we put in place to address off-reserve care related to kinship care.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, that doesn't address the specific recommendation.

Given that the advocate says that the 2009 budget was already shortchanging adolescents in care by cutting supports prematurely, including where the access to PDD funding was blocked because of the shortfalls in that ministry's budget, why is this minister standing by as the very neediest children in care fall through the ever-widening cracks created by her government's neglect?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that I do acknowledge this member's concern. I can tell you that in the spring session, if you'll recall, I did address the budget and monitoring the budget, making changes as they became necessary. In fact, in August of this year the Treasury Board did allocate a further 72 and a half million dollars to this ministry for child care and for child intervention, and that was to support our programs and services. Thirteen million dollars of that funding went to our family support for children with disabilities.

#### Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard that North Haverbrook finally got its monorail, so I thought I'd see if Fort Macleod might get a police college someday. When Fort Macleod was designated as the site for this training centre in 2006, everyone agreed that a single training facility was necessary. If that's still the case, why is construction taking longer than the completion of the Great Wall of China?

**Mr. Oberle:** I think I made it pretty clear the last time the hon. member asked some questions about this that I had made a promise to the people of Fort Macleod that I would work very hard to identify a need for a facility, and then I would work hard to get that profiled on the capital plan. I think the member probably read the newspaper articles, and he knows that's coming along, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did actually read in the *Lethbridge Herald* that you had some money for this project, but to be a little more specific, I'm sort of wondering how much is some money to get this project finally on the go.

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, see, Mr. Speaker, I knew he read the newspaper because that's where he does his research. We've identified some money for planning, and we're going to proceed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The *Lethbridge Herald* is a good place to get a good tip on what the government is up to, but can we expect a concrete date for construction and when this money will be allocated? And when you're meeting with the townspeople and their P3 partner next week, will you detail when this construction is finally going to take place?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, if the member would think about that question for a minute, very obviously I don't at this moment have spending authority, so I could hardly announce any date. I'm working very hard. I've talked to people down in Fort Macleod. As he knows, I've talked to the media. I'm going to be talking more with the people in Fort Macleod. We're working on it, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Chateau Estates Access Road

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For over two years I have been lobbying for the construction of a new road for my constituents in Chateau Estates. A few weeks back in this Assembly the Minister of Transportation said that the road would be ready by October 31. Can the Minister of Transportation explain why the road is not yet ready?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, it was certainly our hope to have this road paved and open this construction season, but the paving of this road will not be completed until spring. Any transportation project completion dates always have the proviso of weather permitting, and if this hon. member has been outside lately, you can see that that white stuff that's on the ground doesn't go real well with paving. I'd like to point out that the . . .

**The Speaker:** We'll come back to you. Don't go away.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Mr. Speaker, if the road cannot be paved this year, can the minister at the very least make a commitment to my constituents to guarantee it will open as a gravel road sooner rather than later?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is yes. And again I'd like to tell this hon. member that he should maybe go outside and feel what that weather is like and understand that we probably can't pave. But we'll get right on that gravel.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Mr. Speaker, I've been outside repeatedly, feeling what my constituents in Chateau Estates feel. When can this minister make a commitment for the completion of the gravel road?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, as soon as the weather clears, we will have people out there working on that road.

I have to say that we're the money supplier on that particular road, and actually it's the county of Rocky View that's delivering the project. But we'll work with them and make sure that they get it done for the hon. member.

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

#### Hospital Site Administrators

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty days is a long time for an emergency response to a crisis. When someone is having a heart attack or a mental breakdown, they need treatment now, not in 40 days. Why does this government continue down a dead-end road and the bureaucratic doom loop of a centralized superboard? We need hospital administrators in place to make decisions, not more or new protocols. To the minister of health: are you telling Albertans that you have no competent people in your hospitals that you can put in charge to make the decisions tomorrow instead of waiting until January 2011 for a new protocol?

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I've indicated this before, but I'd like to just repeat it. Every one of the major acute-care site centres has a clinical lead and also a site admin lead. In other words, there are people with local responsibility that also have local authority to act. They don't have to wait until January. What we're talking about here today as a result of the November 19 meeting with over 100 AHS specialists is a set of new protocols to enhance and improve what's already there.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, a competent administrator needs to be appointed to manage our hospitals. When will the government follow our commonsense approach to appoint a chief administrator in every hospital with the actual authority, not written authority, to use their staff and resources to treat patients when they need it? They come in, and they cannot be treated.

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps he didn't hear the answer to the last question. We have those people there now. As the result of

the meeting on Friday, however, they're going to make significant improvements in the way that the patient flow is handled, in the way that additional units across the hospital will free up space to take in some of the people that are in the emergency wards today. There are specific percentiles. When they get reached, a new protocol kicks in. This is a very, very helpful system of improvement that will yield the results that we're all after.

2:40

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, someone doesn't want to be a percentile before they can be treated. We need an administrator who can actually call in staff, open up beds, and do it now. The minister is obviously unaware of the real cost of keeping someone in a hospital simply because AHS policy refuses to vertically integrate their patient care to follow a patient home to convalesce with proper, necessary home care. A chief administrative officer would implement such a plan and integrate vertically all the way home. When will you appoint a chief administrator that can actually do all of these things from emergency rooms to home care?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, there is an executive team there that does exactly that. As a result of that executive team, I have to tell you that we're now going to be opening 360 net new acute-care beds across the province of Alberta. It's a wonderful announcement. As a result of that, we'll also be hiring 500 additional RNs to help staff those beds. This is all part of the plan. Those are net new nurses, so to speak, as well.

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

### Education Curriculum

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education. There seems to be a lot of pressure on schools to teach a wide variety of subjects such as Canadian history, financial literacy, grammar, home economics, industrial arts, heritage languages, et cetera. Has the minister reviewed the curriculum to determine if there is room to include and/or expand the teaching of some of these subjects within the current program?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last two years we've been engaged in a project we call Inspiring Education. The report came out, and it articulated a vision of three Es for education for the 21st century, to inspire and enable students to achieve successes and fulfillment as engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, with an entrepreneurial spirit. Those are the types of competencies that we need to have in our students. The next step in the process is to figure out how that impacts the development of curriculum and what we include in the curriculum in terms of what knowledge they need to know and what skills they need to have.

**Mr. Allred:** Following that, Mr. Speaker, does the Department of Education review and prioritize the importance of some of these subjects on a regular basis?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, there's a constant process of reviewing and updating curriculum. It involves teachers. It involves stakeholders. It's a fairly comprehensive process. Again, as I indicated in my last answer, we have engaged in this process of Inspiring Education to say: what does 21st century education need to be, and what skills and attributes and knowledge do our students need to have to be successful both locally and globally? We will be reviewing curriculum going forward in that context and evergreening our curriculum in that context.

**Mr. Allred:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that it is impossible to include all of the desired courses in a 12-year school program, has the minister considered adding a 13th year to the school program?

**Mr. Hancock:** Short answer, Mr. Speaker: no. We wouldn't be adding a compulsory 13th year to the curriculum. There is, of course, no reason why a student can't take the courses that they want, take an extra period of time if they want. The school system is open to students up until age 19 at the present time. We are under discussion with the School Act, and there is a possibility that we could discuss whether that should be extended to 20 or 21, but the bottom line is that we will include the core courses that are needed for students to have the knowledge, skills, and attributes that they need to participate globally and locally in the economy, in their community . . .

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

### High-speed Rail Link

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July 2009 Transportation released two investment-grade reports on the benefits of high-speed rail service between Edmonton and Calgary. More than a year after paying the consultants close to a million dollars for these and one other, undisclosed report, the Minister of Transportation said that the province was considering its options. To the Minister of Transportation. A million dollars is lots of money for the reports. Has the government used the reports to make any decision, or are the reports now gathering dust on the shelves?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, we haven't made any decisions about actually moving forward immediately. We use the report when we do our own studies. We're still looking at high-speed rail between Edmonton and Calgary. Mr. Speaker, as you know, we've been in some difficult times here budgetwise, and we'll be looking at moving ahead with high-speed rail in the near future.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The president of the Alberta High-Speed Rail company told the parliamentary committee in Ottawa that he is planning to put a 300 kilometre per hour train on a dedicated passenger highway. Why do Albertans have to hear about an Alberta project through a committee in Ottawa? Why not, for a start, release the other report?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, he's done some research that I haven't seen about somebody reporting to Ottawa on when we're moving ahead with high-speed rail. I absolutely am not sure what he's talking about there.

**Mr. Kang:** Well, I think I know what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Transportation. The estimates are that a high-speed rail line would cost 3 and a half billion dollars and give a \$19 billion boost to the economy over its lifespan, not to mention the environmental, road safety, and job creation benefits. What is the minister doing to move this project forward?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that he did say a few things there now that he knows what he's talking about. There was

some truth in those statements he just made. I have to tell the hon. member that our next step is that I am looking into where we would put the corridors. We have already put in place two pieces of land in Calgary and in Edmonton, and we're looking at connecting those dots.

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

### NAIT Programs

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was with great disappointment and concern that I read recent reports that NAIT is considering cutting nine of its excellent postsecondary programs, programs like medical transcription, avionics engineering technology, and records management. My question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The minister often talks about increasing options and opportunities for students, so why are programs being cut?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to be clear that no decisions about cutting programs have been made. I believe that NAIT is simply looking at the relevancy and effectiveness and demand for approximately nine programs. I think it's important that over time our institutions look at all of the programs that they offer to ensure that they are relevant, that they're serving Albertans, they're serving taxpayers. If NAIT or any other institution wishes to suspend a program, they do have to submit a proposal to the ministry for approval, and as I said, we have not received any.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the hon. minister has final say in this particular process, so given that to be so, what are your decisions to be based on?

**Mr. Horner:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that I have not received a proposal from NAIT. When institutions do submit proposals, the final decisions are based on a solid business case. That includes factors like the graduation rates, the enrolments, the needs of employers and Albertans. The most important factor is how the students in these programs are going to be accommodated, those that are enrolled, those that may want to enrol in them. We look at all of those factors.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. If the programs are to be cut, what happens to those students that are currently enrolled in their first year or have just entered their second year of the program?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, the impact on the student is the highest priority when an institution enters into a strategic review like this, and I'm sure that that's very high on the agenda of NAIT as well. Institutions have to identify in the proposal that they would eventually submit to the ministry the contingencies that they would use for their overall business case, grandfathering students that are in the program as an example. In the case of NAIT they have assured the department that any prospective students will have those contingencies and those protections.

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

### Alberta Health Services President

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Stephen Duckett's cookie video has had over 70,000 hits on the web in three days. He's sort of on track to rival Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber. He's been on the TV news as far away as Europe. Unfortunately, Dr. Duckett has made himself a joke, which was made clear to me in many candid conversations in the last three days. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does this minister have full confidence in Stephen Duckett as CEO of Alberta Health Services?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, Dr. Duckett has an enormous responsibility. He made some inappropriate and very unfortunate comments. I have spoken with him about that. I believe his own board, to whom he reports directly, will also be speaking with him about it. I know he deeply regrets the comments. It's just unfortunate that it happened at a time when we had such good news to share with regard to emergency room protocols.

2:50

**Dr. Taft:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't answer my question, so my question I will repeat. Is the Minister of Health and Wellness still saying he has full confidence in Stephen Duckett as the CEO of Alberta Health Services?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I know that as part of Dr. Duckett's performance review the board will be speaking with him about performance measures that deal with quality, with access, with sustainability. Perhaps they'll even be talking about these comments. I don't know. That will be up to the board to deal with that. In the meantime we'll continue to focus on what we're trying to do, and that's to improve health care and health care outcomes for Albertans.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, I think the minister's responses speak volumes. Clearly, he does not have confidence in Dr. Duckett. Let me make a suggestion here. The second-quarter update provided today shows that Alberta Health and Wellness is underspending its budget by \$184 million. Why isn't Alberta Health Services mobilizing all of its resources at its disposal to improve the health care system?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I think the announcement that he's talking about, which our minister of finance made, refers to a deficit that perhaps may not have been as great as they were projecting, but I'll have the minister of finance augment, please.

**The Speaker:** I'm afraid the time is gone.

Hon. members, we've been able to recognize 19 members today. There were 114 questions and responses.

Before we continue with the Routine, I would like to advise all members that six years ago, on November 22, 15 of you were elected for the first time. I would like to extend congratulations to the hon. members for Foothills-Rocky View, Peace River, Calgary-West, Calgary-Foothills, Highwood, Calgary-Nose Hill, Calgary-Hays, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Stony Plain, Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Lougheed, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Calgary-Mountain View, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Currie, and Lethbridge-East. This is your sixth anniversary today. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore: one year ago today you were re-elected for the second time. Today is also the anniversary of his arrival in the world – what a day it was for his mother – of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.



Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll continue.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if it might be appropriate, before we start Members' Statements, given the time, to ask that we waive the rule that says we finish at 3 o'clock and allow Members' Statements to be completed in their entirety.

**The Speaker:** Do I take it that the Routine would then conclude at the conclusion of Members' Statements and the remainder of the Routine would just not be continued with?

**Mr. Hancock:** That's what I suggested, but perhaps it would be more appropriate to suggest that we complete the Routine.

**The Speaker:** So because we're coming up against Standing Order 7(7), which basically says that at 3 o'clock the Speaker shall notify the Assembly, there's a motion, which requires unanimous consent, that we would complete the Routine notwithstanding that we've passed 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Speaker:** Okay. We'll continue with Members' Statements, and we'll conclude directly at 3 o'clock. We will conclude then.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka with a member's statement, please.

#### Gord Bamford

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly honoured now to rise and recognize Mr. Gord Bamford for his many achievements and accomplishments, not only for the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka but for this province and entire country. Gord grew up just outside of Lacombe, where his family recognized the importance of country life and community involvement. One of the most profound childhood experiences for Gord was 4-H, where he learned invaluable life lessons such as responsibility and leadership. He's a true country boy, devoted family man, skilled entertainer, and a very successful multi-award-winning Canadian country music artist. He has written and recorded songs with some of Nashville's greatest and has shared the stage with Reba McEntire, Tim McGraw, Brooks and Dunn, and the legendary George Strait.

Mr. Speaker, this year has been a phenomenal year for Gord: being named the 2010 Canadian Country Music Association male artist of the year award, receiving the Country Music Television video of the year for *Day Job*, album of the year as well as a humanitarian of the year award. Just recently the Lacombe Day-break Rotary Club awarded Gord the Paul Harris fellowship award for his generous support and humanitarian efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Gord is realizing his dream and using his success to create opportunity, strengthen community, and effect positive change for kids. For the past three years he has hosted the Gord Bamford Charity Golf Tournament. In 2009 he raised \$170,000 for local charities, and this year \$230,000 was generated to support charities such as Big Brothers & Big Sisters, Lacombe accessible park, Lacombe Athletic Park society, Ronald McDonald House in Red Deer, and the Make-a-Wish Foundation. As Gord so profoundly said: "It's not about making it, it's about making it matter."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Gord Bamford for his accomplishments and his continued efforts in making it matter. Thank you.

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

### Provincial Savings Strategy

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first-quarter update forecast the value of the heritage fund at \$14.1 billion. Two years ago last March the fund was valued at \$17 billion. Let's compare the heritage fund's lacklustre performance to the Norway fund, which is now worth over \$500 billion according to the Norwegian central bank. Norway's fund received its first inflow of capital only 14 years ago. They've saved \$500 billion in 14 years while this government has managed to save only \$14 billion in 34 years. What a difference. While Alberta can't even return the heritage fund to its 2008 value of \$17 billion, Norway forecasts that their energy savings will grow by over \$250 billion in the next four years to total \$765 billion.

Research concludes that there is not a significant difference in oil and gas production in Alberta and Norway. In 2009 Norway produced about 2 million barrels per day, Alberta 1.9 million barrels per day. Alberta outperformed in 2009 when it came to natural gas production. It was almost 20 per cent more than what the Norwegians did.

Public debate on the petroleum fund in Norway has included a discussion on whether the country should use more of the energy revenues for the annual budget instead of saving for the future, whether the level of exposure to the volatile and risky stock market is financially safe, and whether the investment policy of the petroleum fund is ethical. These are just a few examples. The Norwegians have devoted a great deal of attention to this issue while Alberta's government has lagged behind.

Alberta Liberals have repeatedly encouraged this government to do a better job of saving for the future. Only the sustainability fund, an Alberta Liberal idea adopted by this government . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

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

### Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege that I rise today to acknowledge and commemorate the 33rd annual Croatian Canadian Folklore Federation West Festival, which was successfully hosted by the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble and school of Edmonton, held over the May long weekend of this year in our capital city. For over 35 years the Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble of Edmonton, known as Domagoj, under the auspices of the Nativity of Mary Croatian Catholic Church, has exemplified an unwavering commitment to preserve the songs, dances, and national costumes of the centuries-old Croatian culture.

The Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble is also a member of the Croatian Canadian Folklore Federation West, whose goal is to preserve traditional Croatian folklore and to share its rich cultural traditions at the national level. Since Domagoj's inception this ensemble has had a long-standing presence in our community by participating in major events in the city of Edmonton, which includes the 1975 opening ceremonies of the Edmonton Coliseum, known today as Rexall Place; the Commonwealth Games in 1978; and is one of the first cultural ensembles to proudly take part in Edmonton's first Heritage Festival.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations and best wishes to all of the performers, teachers, organizers, volunteers, families, and friends who through their tireless generosity, diligence, and dedication ensured an outstanding and very successful folklore festival for all

to enjoy. The diverse cultural mosaic in Alberta, which includes the Croatian heritage and traditions, is truly a blessing for which I'm very grateful. Thank you all and God bless. [Remarks in Croatian]  
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

### Orders of the Day Motions for Returns

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* on behalf.

#### Carbon Capture and Storage Funding

M14. Mr. Hehr moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence sent to the government between January 1, 2008, and September 10, 2010, from businesses and nongovernmental organizations regarding the government's funding of carbon capture and storage technology.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the carbon capture and storage fund is an enormous government expenditure and that it represents government's central response to climate change and that this technology still remains unproven and untested and that 2 billion taxpayer dollars are intended for this technology, Albertans need to know more. With Bill 24 there is no identification on when this long-term liability will be undertaken by the government in terms of when we're going to take it over from the industry. We may have discussed this with the private companies investing in new technology. Furthermore, there's a lack of clarity in how this money will be expended. Again, with assuming long-term liability for these potential products for the good of Albertans, there needs to be public disclosure of the correspondence that has occurred to date between industry and the government on CCS. We require information to understand the government's decision to undertake this liability.

It is for these reasons that we request copies of "all correspondence sent to the government between January 1, 2008, and September 10, 2010, from businesses and nongovernmental organizations regarding the government's funding of carbon capture and storage technology."

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this motion for a return is – I don't know if I'd call it sneaky, but we'll call it sneaky on two accounts. What the opposition is wanting us to do is their research for them. We have the bill before the Legislature. We can debate it as much as we want. But if you heard the preamble by the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, what he was really saying is: if you provide us with all this information, then you'll be doing all our research for us as part of the debate on the bill.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's sneaky because as a motion for a return this is a direct attempt to bypass freedom of information, and bypassing freedom of information, or the FOIP process, violates third-party confidentiality. The FOIP process is essential to ensure that third-party confidentiality is protected. This request is not for the government's information, but it's for all the public correspondence received from businesses and nongovernmental organizations related to carbon capture and storage technology funding, and it would be inappropriate for the province to release that information without the permission of all third parties.

Now, if the member is interested in really learning more about CCS technology and our work with industry, the member can access the Alberta Energy website. This website lists all the names of

companies who have been asked to submit full-project CCS proposals. If there's an interest in more information about these projects, then it would be simpler to call these companies directly. The companies then could provide the information that the member is requesting. The information can also be requested through appropriate channels such as, as I said earlier, FOIP.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, when we really get to the real intent behind this motion, it's that (a) they want us to do their research for them, and (b) they want to ensure that they bypass the FOIP process. So I would urge all members to reject this motion.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. This motion for a return is calling for transparency and accountability; it's not calling for a shortcutting of the information process. The information has obviously been collected by the government. Albertans are interested in the information, and it is our job to ask the government to provide that information to Albertans. We already know through Bill 24 that the government has committed \$2 billion to sequestration, but what we don't know – and I'm not sure to what extent the government does know, but they could at least bring us up to date and Albertans up to date – is the cost of assuming the liability once the carbon dioxide is placed into the ground, hopefully there to stay.

The Minister of Energy suggests that this is an end run or that this is an alternative to the FOIP process. The FOIP process, Mr. Speaker, is a very lengthy undertaking. It's also a very expensive undertaking. The Liberal opposition caucus does not have the amount of money necessary either to FOIP all the documents or to do the research necessary. It's not as easy as the minister would have us believe, that we simply dial up the various individuals listed on the minister's website and ask them: what do you think?

The information has been gathered. It has been paid for by the taxpayer's dime, in this case probably several millions in terms of consultation efforts. We're simply saying that Albertans deserve to have that information. That's why we as the Liberal opposition are asking for the type of transparency and accountability that the Premier promised during his leadership campaign but, unfortunately, has yet to be delivered.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* to close the debate.

**Mr. Hehr:** I'll reiterate a few of the points that my colleague from Calgary-*Varsity* made. If the information is there, I would believe it is in the best interest of all members of the House and, in fact, most people in the province of Alberta to receive this information, for all of us in the House to know what the government is undertaking, what liabilities we the people of Alberta are undertaking in carbon capture and storage and having that information to us from the companies themselves, who will have engineers who have worked on this correspondence, who have understood sort of the risks that they are passing along to the Alberta people and how this may affect us long term and why the government is undertaking this liability.

For one, we can say that we can go through the FOIP process, but again that is very difficult, very onerous, and very costly when the information is already compiled, already ready for Alberta citizens. If we could have that information, it would assist the Alberta people greatly.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

### Nuclear Power

M15. Mr. Hehr moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the time period between January 1, 2006, and September 10, 2010.

**Mr. Hehr:** Immediately following the last provincial election Bruce Power, a major Ontario-based nuclear power company, took over ownership of Energy Alberta Corp., a company that had made an initial proposal to build a nuclear power station in northern Alberta in Peace Country. In March 2008 Bruce Power filed an application with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to prepare a site for future construction of a nuclear power station. In January 2009 Bruce Power sent a letter to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission announcing that it would be withdrawing its initial application as it had wanted to change the site in question. According to Bruce Power, local residents had great concern about the local aquifers, so BP wanted to shift away from that locale. Bruce Power has settled on the Whitecourt location, northeast of this initial site. The government has continually denied any request for information over this highly controversial topic.

Before we can even consider nuclear power as a potential energy source in Alberta, full consultations with the citizens of this province are a must. The issue deserves a full public debate where all arguments may be heard and the best decision can be made. This government continues to lack transparency in their plans for nuclear energy in Alberta, and in the public interest of Albertans we are requesting that correspondence between Bruce Power and the Alberta government become public.

To give Albertans a sense of the direction of this government, this administration needs to lay its cards on the table. It is for this reason we would ask for copies of “all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the time period between January 1, 2006, and September 10, 2010.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again I rise. This is not dissimilar to the last request. In fact, it’s identical, again trying to get us to provide them with all of their research material, and this material, again, is available through the FOIP process. I won’t say any more than that because I’m dying to hear the debate under second reading of a couple of private members’ initiatives that the members of the third or fourth party over there denied unanimous consent for. They wanted to get on to the debate, so I’ll let them get on to it.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I, too, am very interested in the private members’ debate. However, it’s privacy that we’re talking about right now.

The information paid for by Alberta taxpayers should not be withheld, should not be used as a force against Albertans. I don’t believe, hon. Minister of Energy and Mr. Speaker, that there is a more controversial concern when it comes to power production and dissemination than atomic energy and the potential use and placement of it. For the government to suggest that this is their information, privy to them, that even if we were to put forward a FOIP request, they would provide it to us, is ridiculous. So we did what was requested of us to do. We asked for transparency. We asked for accountability in the form of Motion for a Return 15.

This business of tilting the playing fields. “Because we have all the information, we will control that information, and we’ll hold our cards very tightly to our chest because we don’t believe, in our omniscient opinion, that it is any of your business” is basically what the Minister of Energy is saying. It’s not just Liberal business or information for the hon. members of the Wildrose or the NDP or our independent Member for Calgary-Currie. It’s information that is very vital to the health and well-being of Albertans in general.

While the majority of countries in Europe, with the notable exception of France, are moving away from nuclear energy – Germany, for example, being one of the fastest retreaters from nuclear energy – the mere thought that it’s being proposed for Alberta, even if it’s changed to the Whitecourt area, which is less on the fault lines than was previously proposed, is a major consideration.

Bruce Power backed out, which I’m thankful for. But until Albertans have a sense of where this government is going with future energy production, they have a right to be concerned. If the Minister of Energy is not willing to provide that transparency and accountability, then I suppose we will go through the FOIP process, but I believe it’s not only a waste of time but a waste of money. It should be information readily available to all Albertans. We shouldn’t have to be standing up in this House through a motion for a return requesting that information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude the debate.

**Mr. Hehr:** Yeah. In my view, Mr. Speaker, the nuclear question is one of the most important debates the Alberta people will have. Any way the Minister of Energy could facilitate this being an open and honest debate and assisting members of this House, all members of this honourable House, with retaining all this information and having all of this information, I believe, would serve its citizens well. I reiterate that I believe our motion for a return is for the benefit of all Albertans, not merely to give our researchers a break. Why go through the FOIP process when this seems like a simple thing that the Alberta people would be most interested in?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Don’t shake your head, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo closed the debate.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

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

#### Bill 206 Utilities Consumer Advocate Act

[Debate adjourned November 15: Ms Notley speaking]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Seven minutes, hon. member. Proceed.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was last speaking about this issue last Monday, obviously, which would make sense, and had risen to speak, generally speaking, in favour of the notion of having a Utilities Consumer Advocate and having that Utilities Consumer Advocate report to the Legislature.

Let me start just ever so briefly. You know, I'm certainly pleased that the Member for Calgary-McCall has put forward this bill. I think it's a good bill. I do need, of course, to suggest that it's not a bill that I would like for us to have a requirement for. It's a bill that arises from the unfortunate fallout from the extremely poorly thought-out decision of this government to embark upon a program of deregulation.

While I appreciate the Member for Calgary-McCall coming forward now and bringing forward this motion, it does of course remind me that when this program was first pursued by this government back in the mid-1990s, members from the Member for Calgary-McCall's own caucus, unfortunately, at the time supported the process of deregulation and advocated in favour of it. I am pleased that they have now reached the point where they acknowledge the error of their ways, and it's really unfortunate that members opposite, members of the government, are not prepared to also acknowledge what an unfortunate turn of events deregulation has been for Alberta consumers.

Having said that, I think that it's really important as well that we talk about why it is we need to have a Utilities Consumer Advocate actually report to the Legislature. I think, if anything, that the events of today are yet another example of why it is that we cannot expect this government to let anybody within their circle speak out openly without fear of reprisal, without fear of having their message sanitized or massaged or limited in some way even where that speaking out might be in the best interests of Albertans. I mean, we've clearly seen that this government is more interested in controlling the message than it is in addressing the substance of that message and engaging Albertans in an effort to reach the best outcome that might come from having a thorough conversation about whatever that message is. Instead, we spend a lot of time massaging the message, spending way too much money on public relations campaigns, in some cases even arguably putting out misinformation through those public relations campaigns. It's all about spin and message and very little about actually fixing the problem.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

What we do know is that Albertans pay, generally speaking, the highest utility rates in the country and that they have been subject to some really quite horrendous hard-sell tactics on the doorstep by the companies that are now in that field. The government's response has been half-hearted and milquetoast at best in terms of protecting consumers even in that setting. We've got this long-standing problem with the rates simply being too high and us now having given up the ability to manage that. We have the spectre of this government under the previous Premier handing out huge cheques to consumers on the eve of elections to try and cover up the fact that deregulation was such a negative development for consumers. Now we have, you know, hard-sell tactics on the doorstep with respect to consumers, who are unable to really wade through the complexity of the market. This is what, of course, the government calls choice, but really all it is is a lack of choice and being forced into the position of having to spend much more for a very basic service than should ever have been the case. That's because of a really, really unwise and ill-thought-out policy decision on the part of this provincial government.

3:20

Certainly, having the consumer advocate report to the Legislature would assist somewhat anyway in this long, sorry tradition of people internal to this government being punished in some way for

attempting to speak out about systemic concerns and problems that they identify in the course of their work within the government. We really do have a long and sorry tradition in that respect in this province. You know, we don't have whistle-blower legislation, which, of course, is something that we've long advocated for. We steadfastly refuse at this point to expand the reporting process of many sort of internal advocate types to the Legislature because we'd much rather make sure that the ministers' offices and their associated communications people can massage whatever types of reports come out if, in fact, they do come out. That, of course, is combined with having a freedom of information regime that allows the government to exempt practically every piece of internal information from disclosure simply by calling it advice to the minister, which is much of what the current utilities advocate information can be characterized as.

We do want to support this movement towards enhancing the independence of the Utilities Consumer Advocate as put forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall. We're in support of the broader jurisdiction and the range of content that is offered up by this legislation. I think that's also an improvement. I would have liked to have seen the enforcement ability of the consumer advocate as outlined in this act be slightly stronger. Nonetheless, fundamental to the rationale behind this act is the notion of independence, and I can think of no better day than today to talk about how much we need to support the opportunity for people to be independent within this government and speak openly as a result.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East on Bill 206.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. This bill would establish the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which would be tasked with providing information to electricity and natural gas consumers. Furthermore, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, UCA for short, would investigate consumer complaints regarding natural gas or electricity. In short, this bill seeks to protect consumers from unfair business practices by giving them an avenue to voice their complaints. This bill offers a good solution.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is no problem to solve. The Utilities Consumer Advocate as it exists today already protects consumers with a collaborative approach. The advocate receives input and guidance from an experienced advisory board, which contains representatives from a range of consumer groups. These representatives are residential and small-business consumers from throughout our province. They then work in collaboration with the department in order to protect Albertans from utility issues, including poor billing practices and inappropriate sales tactics.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this government has shown its dedication to protecting residential and small-business consumers. It is sometimes difficult for small-scale consumers of natural gas and electricity to have a voice if they feel they have been treated improperly. The Utilities Consumer Advocate has given Albertans this voice, but not only does it give Albertans a voice; it also ensures that Albertans are aware of the current state of the natural gas and electricity market. By the end of 2010 the UCA will have attended a total of 40 trade shows, exhibitions, and other events throughout this province. It also provides up-to-date pricing information on its website.

In my experience talking with some of my constituents, I know that finding information on current natural gas and electricity prices is sometimes very difficult. The Utilities Consumer Advocate alleviates some of these difficulties by providing Albertans looking

for information on electricity and natural gas prices with a destination to find this information.

Clearly, the UCA has done nothing short of an outstanding job of being accessible to all Albertans. It has done more than simply inform consumers; it has played an active role in responding to consumer complaints in a responsible manner. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the last year the UCA has held nearly 100 hearings before the Alberta Utilities Commission. Overall, the combined efforts of the UCA and other intervenors at the rate hearing reduced the price of electricity and natural gas charged by utility companies.

Mr. Speaker, there is no need to implement stand-alone legislation when the UCA already does an admirable job of protecting consumers. Importantly, the advocate does not simply concern itself with problems when they arise. It also prevents future problems by working with consumer groups when there are common interests, and this improves the efficiency of regulatory interventions on behalf of all consumers.

Regulatory intervention is an unfortunate yet inevitable process. It is our duty as a government to step in when it becomes apparent that an individual or corporation is using the system to gain an unfair advantage, and this government has shown its commitment to enhancing the efficiency of this process as it relates to intervention in the natural gas and electricity market. We have done so by creating and maintaining the Utilities Consumer Advocate. It has worked diligently to introduce good evidence supporting consumer requirements in the regulatory process. In short, Mr. Speaker, it gives consumers a collective voice that individuals alone do not possess. The Utilities Consumer Advocate gives a voice to consumers by working closely with industry in order to ensure that consumers are represented.

Mr. Speaker, the Utilities Consumer Advocate already does a commendable job in protecting consumers with a collaborative approach, and this bill does not improve that status quo. Therefore, I will not be supporting this bill, and I urge all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you wish to join in 206? I checked the list. You have already spoken in the second reading.

**Mr. Hehr:** It was such a good bill that I wanted to speak twice, but I understand.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill in second reading? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to speak today to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. It's brought forward, as we know, by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. As you know, this bill seeks to create the office of a Utilities Consumer Advocate, which would be responsible for providing information and guidance to small electricity and natural gas consumers throughout Alberta. In addition, this Utilities Consumer Advocate as provided for in the legislation would review the effectiveness of government responses made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. The Utilities Consumer Advocate would also have to report annually to this Assembly.

Essentially, this bill seeks to provide better protection for consumers of electricity and natural gas in Alberta, but, with respect, when I look at the bill, I see a piece of legislation that attempts to solve a problem for which a solution already exists. Here in Alberta

we already have the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which has done commendable and effective work in protecting electricity and gas consumers all around the province. The current Utilities Consumer Advocate provides a voice to electricity and gas consumers in Alberta. The Utilities Consumer Advocate has the power to investigate, mediate, and make Albertans' voices heard by both government regulators and the utilities industry. At the end of the day the Utilities Consumer Advocate puts Albertans first and promotes their best interests. The Utilities Consumer Advocate helps these consumers make informed choices regarding their energy options.

3:30

It's clear that Albertans are contacting the Utilities Consumer Advocate and feel that it can protect their best interests. I'm pleased to say that the Utilities Consumer Advocate has protected Albertans from substantial rate increases by intervening in approximately 100 gas and electricity proceedings in front of the Alberta Utilities Commission on an annual basis. It's been the voice of small energy consumers in Alberta since its inception, and Albertans have recognized this. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall would be interested to know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day. That translates into tens of thousands of calls on an annual basis. It's clear that Albertans know who to contact. They know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is providing them with a voice and protecting their interests.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is also constantly working to further educate Albertans on the services offered by their department. For example, in 2006 Albertans told this government that they wanted to know more about the energy options available to them. They also wanted to know how they could better manage their energy use and where to go for help. This led to the redevelopment of the Utilities Consumer Advocate website. The government conducted consumer research to pinpoint the kind of information that is important to consumers, and the redeveloped website certainly helped address those needs.

Currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate is running a consumer awareness campaign. This campaign includes a wide variety of tools, including video and their user-friendly website, that touch on a variety of issues. These issues include how to read a meter, how to read your electrical bill, and a simple explanation of the electricity market, just to name a few. This campaign is designed to reach out to Albertans who may not know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is a powerful resource that will assist them in making informed decisions regarding their energy options.

Mr. Speaker, not only does the Utilities Consumer Advocate protect and educate consumers, it also investigates complaints. A major part of protecting consumers involves investigating their complaints and responding appropriately. Over the past seven years 414 investigations have been conducted against energy marketers. These investigations are carried out on behalf of the consumer to protect their best interests. From these 414 investigations 193 enforcement actions have taken place. These actions range from warning letters to criminal prosecution. In addition, Service Alberta already investigates complaints from Albertans regarding consumer business transactions that are covered by the Fair Trading Act.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate has a long track record of providing a voice to Albertans and protecting their interests in a wide variety of ways. It has been a valuable tool and voice for thousands of Albertans, and I commend this office on their dedication and commitment to protecting Alberta's energy consumers and assisting Albertans to make informed decisions about their energy choices.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall believes that this bill will go a long way to protecting consumers. I would, however, respectfully submit that the current Utilities Consumer Advocate is already doing this. Albertans are using the Utilities Consumer Advocate because they know it provides them with a voice, they know that it provides numerous educational tools, and because they know it has their best interests in mind.

I would like to thank the member for introducing this legislation because it's given us all an opportunity to consider and contemplate the important work that the Utilities Consumer Advocate has done, but unfortunately I, as would be obvious by now, will not be able to support this bill.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and join second reading debate on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Bill 206 seeks to create the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA. The proposed UCA would be responsible for providing information and advice to small consumers of electricity and natural gas in Alberta. The bill also tasks the Utilities Consumer Advocate with investigating consumer complaints and reviewing the effectiveness of government responses to recommendations made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. If this sounds familiar, it's because the government has already created the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is proposing through this bill that it would make the Utilities Consumer Advocate an officer of the Legislature. In addition, the proposed UCA would have to report annually to this Assembly.

I presume this bill is attempting to fix the Utilities Consumer Advocate. But, Mr. Speaker, the current UCA is protecting Albertans from substantial price increases, it is educating Albertans on energy use, and it gives small energy consumers in this province a voice. The current Utilities Consumer Advocate is working for Albertans, so creating a new stand-alone act that changes a system that Albertans are using and have responded positively to is redundant.

The current UCA's annual budget is \$8.5 million. This is made up of industry funding split between two sources: 80 per cent of the funding for the UCA comes from the Balancing Pool, and the remaining 20 per cent comes from AltaGas and ATCO Gas.

Mr. Speaker, currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate is part of the budget of Service Alberta. Within the budget of Service Alberta our government can adequately prioritize utility matters against other critical issues in Alberta such as education and health care.

Bill 206 will increase costs associated with the Utilities Consumer Advocate as under the proposed act the advocate would be an officer of the Legislature. Repositioning this department will increase the number of staff costs associated with reporting. This government has prioritized its spending, focusing on core programs that Albertans value. Budget 2010 increased funding for priority areas, including \$2.1 billion more for Health and \$250 million more for school boards. This government recently announced that it would provide additional funding to school boards for teacher salaries. Funding for seniors benefits, AISH, and PDD was protected during the downturn. There is a long list of programs and services that this government has been able to increase or maintain funding for during this economic downturn due to a long history of fiscal restraint.

Mr. Speaker, the current Utilities Consumer Advocate fields thousands of calls on a yearly basis. They provide Albertans with

resources to learn about electricity and natural gas, and they provide educational tools that empower consumers. This government is already ensuring that consumers are protected and focusing on core programs that Albertans value.

With that being said, I will not be supporting Bill 206, and I urge all members not to support this bill. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I have on my list here three members: Edmonton-Ellerslie, Calgary-Bow, and Edmonton-Rutherford. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall. I would like to thank the member for bringing this forward.

The purpose of this bill is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA, which would provide information and advice to small electricity and natural gas consumers in the province. It would also review the effectiveness of government responses to recommendations made by Alberta Utilities Commission. In other words, Mr. Speaker, what this bill is trying to do is introduce more government regulation to the electricity and natural gas sector, regulation that Alberta does not need. Currently our government's regulatory review process is looking to streamline regulation, and Bill 206 goes against this streamlining by creating a redundant regulatory body which our government already has.

Before I begin to go any further on this matter, let me be clear that I believe that consumers in the electricity and natural gas sectors should feel safe and should feel protected. However, that protection should not come in the form of yet another bureaucratic layer of government that will merely be duplication of an already-existing regulatory body.

3:40

Alberta already has a sound regulatory system in the electricity and natural gas sector to protect consumers, which is the existence of the Alberta Utilities Consumer Advocate. There is a framework in place that balances the interests of consumers and utilities. This framework is almost an identical replica of that of the existing UCA. For example, one of the services that UCA intends to provide is giving consumers the information they need to make informed choices about how to purchase electricity and natural gas.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the notion that consumers should be informed and educated about purchasing utilities. The only problem I have is that the existing UCA lists informing and educating consumers about electricity and natural gas issues as one of their main responsibilities. It is the same service just worded differently, so why do we need it twice? Also, the Regulatory Review Secretariat already leads regulatory reform within the government of Alberta and works to support the government's goals and priorities. It does so by placing an emphasis on the development of quality regulations and motions, on the impact of regulation on stakeholders. The streamlining of the regulatory review process does not weaken consumer protection; it makes it easier and less confusing.

The Regulatory Review Secretariat developed guiding principles of regulation which include, first, necessity, meaning that strong evidence is needed before regulating, ensuring that existing regulations remain relevant through ongoing review; second, effectiveness, which implies that a results-based approach and the design of regulation will ensure that regulations adequately comply with the enforcement; thirdly, proportionality, stating that the government should regulate as lightly as possible and use alternatives when possible; and, finally, transparency, stating that government should

consult widely before regulating or changing regulations. This is evidence that the consumers of the utilities sector are being protected, just not with redundant legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the next point I would like to talk about, which goes hand in hand with streamlining the regulatory review process, is Alberta's commitment to staying competitive in the business market. In this Assembly our government recently implemented the Competitiveness Act, which furthers this government's commitment to make Alberta one of the most economically competitive places in the world. Under the act the province is also committed to creating the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs. With stronger competition comes a stronger economy and a better quality of life for all Albertans.

It would make no sense to endorse Bill 206, a bill that preaches more regulation, in a time when we are trying to maximize competitiveness. All this will do is burden the utility companies with another complication in trying to perform their business. It would hinder investment and result in higher rates charged to consumers.

Alberta is fine the way it is, Mr. Speaker. Under the current regulatory regime in the electricity and natural gas sector Alberta has the best of both worlds. We have a regulatory structure that protects our consumers to the fullest extent while at the same time not burdening the market with unnecessary regulations that do nothing but waste time and money. Given the way that the regulations in the electricity and natural gas sectors currently stand and this government's current objective to generate an even better economy, there's no need for the UCA to interfere. Albertans simply do not benefit from this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-McCall for giving me the opportunity to express my views on why we should stay the course with our current regulation practices in the electricity and natural gas sectors. With that being said, I cannot support this bill.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. The objective of this bill is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This bill is not necessary as we already have an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA. Therefore, another office would only create confusion, red tape, and bureaucratic redundancy.

Moreover, Bill 206 proposes to give the UCA broad powers to inquire and investigate, including seizure powers and powers to hold hearings and to compel witnesses. This is inappropriate as these powers affect Albertans' rights. It is unusual to give such powers to a body that's not carrying out quasi-judicial functions. In addition, Bill 206 would allow the UCA to investigate complaints about the fairness of Alberta Utilities Commission hearings. This is wrong as the UCA is a party to a hearing before the Alberta Utilities Commission, and as such it would be improper for it to investigate the fairness of Alberta Utilities Commission hearings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it is necessary to discuss the role of the current UCA as well as the support that the office provides to consumers so that members of this Legislature clearly understand that an advocate already exists. The current UCA is the voice of small energy consumers in Alberta. It offers mediation services between consumers and the electrical or gas industries. Furthermore, the UCA office intervenes in regulatory hearings to represent the interests of residential, farm, and small commercial consumers. The UCA works with other customer groups where there are

common interests to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of regulatory interventions on behalf of consumers.

Providing support is a priority for the UCA. For instance, the UCA has offices in Calgary and Edmonton to provide support to consumers. In fact, the UCA is contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day. It deals with consumers' concerns about utility companies and helps them make informed choices about their energy options. In general, the majority of calls are from consumers seeking information about the utilities options when they're moving or setting up new accounts. Also, many calls are related to service disconnections and people seeking information about contracts.

In fact, the volume of calls to the UCA represents less than 2 per cent of all calls received by Service Alberta's information call centre. Mr. Speaker, in the past seven years the UCA has investigated 414 consumer complaints against energy marketers and has carried out 193 enforcement actions, ranging from warning letters to criminal prosecutions.

To further raise awareness and increase its presence in Alberta, on July 5 the UCA opened a new Calgary office to industry and government officials. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the UCA is supporting a growing number of Albertans, and here are a few examples. It receives nearly 40,000 phone calls from consumers to the main information line, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year. The UCA website received more than 35,000 visits, a 20 per cent increase from the year before. The UCA is in contact with Alberta consumers through letters and e-mails received as well as office visits and trade shows.

The UCA registered in just about a hundred hearings before the Alberta Utilities Commission in 2009-10. Overall, the combined efforts of the UCA and all intervenors at rate hearings reduced the rate increases requested by utility companies. Throughout the quarter the UCA was active in an average of more than 30 Alberta Utilities Commission proceedings. This is major work that's being done in this province.

**3:50**

The UCA utilizes the services of a number of legal counsels and consultants to enable it to participate effectively in this large volume of activities. However, not all utility applications are dealt with through litigation processes. In fact, many are dealt with through negotiations, which tend to be less costly than the litigated processes.

Mr. Speaker, the point of this whole speech is to point out that Alberta already has a Utilities Consumer Advocate office, and the office of this UCA is clearly doing a great job fulfilling their role and mandate. For this reason alone I do not support Bill 206 as it's not necessary and would only detract from the great work that the current UCA is doing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to join debate today in second reading of Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. The intention of this bill, as we know, is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The bill would create an additional regulatory layer that seeks to supervise an established and successful advocate for Albertans. The protection and education of utility consumers is very important, but this bill, I believe, is redundant as Alberta already has an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA as commonly known. The proposed advocate already exists and plays a vital role in the education of utility consumers in Alberta.

Consumer education in regard to utilities is extremely important, as I think all members of the House would agree. Albertans have a voice when it comes to these matters, and the UCA is that voice. Mr. Speaker, the current UCA is a tool which Albertans may use for issues regarding utilities and for receiving education about utilities in this province. In today's high-technology world accessibility has become a growing concern. The ability of Albertans to contact the UCA is taken extremely seriously. That is why there are a multitude of ways in which consumers can contact the existing UCA. They may contact them via phone, in writing, in person, or through its website.

Mr. Speaker, the Utilities Consumer Advocate provides information and advice and represents Albertans' interests regarding electricity and gas markets in this province. In addition, the information consumers can access through the UCA could be as straightforward as explanations of utility bills and even rate comparisons, but the UCA is readily available, and it is accessed regularly by individuals seeking guidance on making informed decisions about their energy options.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is in fact contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day, and over the course of a year the UCA fields nearly 40,000 phone calls from consumers. These phone calls come from all areas of the province, and the highly qualified staff of the UCA deal with a myriad of issues concerning utilities in Alberta. Not only do consumers have the ability to call the UCA; they may also access its website. The website, Mr. Speaker, logs over 35,000 visits a year. The website has been designed in a visitor-friendly format. It was reviewed as recently as September and provides even greater access to information today.

Having a Utilities Consumer Advocate is important to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and to further promote awareness of the services it offers, a television advertisement has begun airing on six television networks province-wide. The advertisement directs consumers to the aforementioned website, where they can find helpful information regarding utilities in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, along with the television advertisement the Utilities Consumer Advocate launched a consumer awareness campaign earlier this year. The campaign is targeted toward promoting an increased awareness of the UCA so that consumers know they will have an advocate or a voice who will give them unbiased information regarding utilities. In 2010 alone the advocate attended 35 trade shows throughout the province to help raise awareness levels in our province.

The relationship between utility providers and Alberta consumers, municipalities, and industry is pivotal. To ensure these relationships remain stable and healthy, the UCA has created a stakeholder relations team. This team provides information on issues and seeks opportunities to actively work together to benefit small consumers. Mr. Speaker, in the past year the stakeholder relations team has met with stakeholders in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Strathcona county, Vegreville, St. Albert, Leduc, and Nisku. This team's role is integral to making sure that the right environment is in place for both consumers and utility providers across Alberta.

Utility consumers have a right to access information that will help them make smart choices when dealing with utility providers. That is why in March 2010 the UCA opened an office in Calgary to increase its support to consumers. This office not only provides another outlet in which access to utility information may be found; it also strengthens the role of the advocate in southern Alberta. This Calgary office complements the existing Edmonton office in providing support to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, through an open dialogue with consumers the UCA helps ensure that Albertans are

both informed and educated about their various utility options. Accessing information from the UCA is only a phone call or in many cases a click away.

Mr. Speaker, while I believe the intention of the bill is right and I believe that the Member for Calgary-McCall means well in proposing the bill, I would urge that the creation of an alternate body to the UCA which would do the same thing as the Utilities Consumer Advocate currently does is not only fiscally irresponsible but also redundant. The office of the UCA is doing an exemplary job fulfilling their obligations to the utility consumers in this province, and it is important that Albertans have a reliable and transparent entity to turn to when looking at their energy options. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is that entity. In my view, there is no need to fix or alter this body as proposed by Bill 206. The UCA continues to play an important role in educating consumers on their utility choices, and we should not meddle with that success.

Given that, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully submit that I cannot support Bill 206 and would urge all members of the House to do the same. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 206? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really glad that I got a chance to get in here and speak to my colleague's motion on consumer advocates because I'll tell you that in this province as a consumer some days I feel like I'm out there all alone. [interjection] And guess what? I am.

Just a couple of points that I wanted to raise about the idea that's been proposed in Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. Overall, I do agree with this. Let me back up and start from the beginning. Sometimes I wonder if I'm a changeling in Alberta. I definitely was born in Alberta, but I don't believe in deregulation of utilities. Because utilities are so critical to keeping us alive in this winter climate, I think utilities should be publicly owned and controlled. But that's not happening here in my beloved province, so I'll just have to suck that one up and carry on. That is where I come from, so you'll understand where the rest of my argument is.

I was here for sort of the stage 2 of the electricity deregulation, much to my horror, because that, I swear to you, has not been a great deal for Albertans. I'm sure every MLA gets e-mails from people, and if you read the venting columns in the newspaper – wowie – you find this issue in particular coming up all the time. That's the one where people say: "How the heck is it that I could have incurred \$6.52 worth of electrical use in a month and then I'm charged" – and I'm sorry that I don't have all the proper names in my head; I'll just make them up, but they'll be close enough so people will know what I'm talking about – "a transfer fee and then I'm charged an administration fee on the transfer fee and then I'm charged a delivery fee and then an administration fee on the delivery fee and at the end of the bill I've paid \$72.59 for my \$6.52 worth of electricity? What the heck is going on?"

4:00

Everybody in Alberta feels like that. Like, what happened? I'd love to be able to go to someone, phone them up, and say: could you tell me whether we were always paying all of that for electricity and now they've just broken it out so we can truly sob over all of the extra charges in here, or did somehow those extra charges creep in when we deregulated and separated all of the strands of delivery so that each piece of it could charge us for what they were doing before? You can't get that answer from the government currently. I think you do need someone that stands as an advocate between the



people and the provider, and it's not the government. So I'm very much in favour of what the Member for Calgary-McCall has proposed.

In my caucus we always allow independent thought. I'm sorry. That was just the tiniest little dig, Mr. Speaker, and I'll move right along here. We have free votes on private members' business, so if I might make a few suggestions to my colleague that I just picked up as I went through the act, just a couple of things that I noticed.

On page 3 of the act in section (e) – and I'm not going clause by clause; I'm just vaguely referring by waving the paper around that there might be something in the act in second reading, as we're discussing the principle of it, that would talk about reviewing the adequacy and nature of government response to a commission decision, which I find sort of a strange requirement. I always, just for my own amusement, of course, flip things around and go: okay; if I was government – it's the golden rule principle, really – would I be happy about having to conform to that kind of regulation? Because it's asking that office to somehow rule on the government's adequacy, I think that's very difficult to tabulate or make a decision on. I think we might want to look at that one if we get to Committee of the Whole.

The second area is page 4 under the oath. Now, somebody could correct me on this one, but the way this was written – if it was lifted from another act, then we're probably good, but if it wasn't, it's talking about: whoever is in the advocate's office cannot disclose any information except that provided by law. Those are the kinds of clauses that get you in trouble because if somewhere else in the law you haven't provided for every possible opportunity to speak if they need to, you're in trouble because then you're going to be forever going back and amending every little act in order to actually get your piece to work, so we might want to look at that one as well.

On page 6 it talks about provision of funds to a particular independent agency. Again, I'm playing the golden rule here and flipping it over and going: okay; if I was on the government side, would I be happy about this? I would be ecstatic because if I didn't like the utilities advocate office, I could just not fund them. What that clause essentially says is that provided that there's money that's been voted by the Legislature, then it can be disbursed for various reasons, and then it goes on to list the reasons. I think we need to be careful about how that clause is worded because I ran the Advisory Council on Women's Issues for a number of years here in this province, and that was how they got us. That's eventually how they silenced us. They just withdrew our funding, and then there was no money left for an office or to pay anybody or the per diems for the council members or anything, and that was the end. So we need to be a bit firmer about how money is provided; that money would be provided, for example.

I think the last thing also appears on page 6 if you wanted to go into the fine detail, but of course I'm talking about the principle here. It is around putting in a clause that would require the government to respond within a certain period of time. I would suggest that in the annual report it actually list how long it's been that the government has taken to respond to one of the recommendations from the Utilities Consumer Advocate because that does give you a sense of how slowly or quickly the government is moving on a recommendation.

After years and years and years in this House of watching where there are difficulties – for example, the Auditor General's reports. If you go and look at where particular suggestions have been made repeatedly over the years, you'll find that there's actually a philosophical difference usually in the government, that they don't believe in doing something they've been told, or it's difficult and cumbersome. With enough work eventually all of those things can

be overcome, but it does help you identify where there is a roadblock that needs to be worked on with a bit more care and attention than just telling the government: do this. It's a good way of measuring whether there's a deeper problem on hand there.

I hope you'll allow me or you don't mind my making a couple of suggestions that we can work on when we get to Committee of the Whole on this bill. Overall, I do think this is a good idea because I can't say that the current one that is inside of the department and reports directly to the minister – where we have tried to make use of that office through my constituency office in trying to assist constituents, we haven't always met with the success that we were hoping to meet with. So I think this might be preferable.

That's not to say that the staff there aren't doing a good job, but they may not be in a position to react to me as an MLA or sometimes an opposition MLA. That certainly happens where a government minister says: you're going to deal this way with government members and that way with opposition members. That's just inappropriate, and I think we would want to lift something like this out of that and not allow it to happen.

So vote for Bill 206. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there other hon. members wishing to speak on Bill 206?

Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, do you want to close the debate, then?

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand up and speak in favour of Bill 206. The other day I was giving all the reasons for Bill 206. As I said, I have nothing negative to say about the current Utilities Consumer Advocate or any of her staff, and I'm sure she's committed to serving consumers as best as she can. We are not here creating another layer of bureaucracy; we are just strengthening what we have with this bill. That's why this bill was put forward.

Bill 206 would only empower the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate by giving them more tools to do their important work for Albertans. Right now, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Utilities Consumer Advocate is an employee of the government, and their staffers are employed by the government, too, and that is under Service Alberta. Until just recently the Utilities Consumer Advocate was not even a full-time job but one of many hats worn by the deputy minister or an assistant deputy minister or, in other words, someone who directly works for the Minister of Service Alberta.

As an officer of the government the position of the Utilities Consumer Advocate can be eliminated at any time, Mr. Speaker. Their staff can get let go if their budgets are severely cut. Their reports can be edited by government bureaucrats, if they are allowed to release the reports at all. So there are issues with the present Utilities Consumer Advocate office, and they cannot even speak to the media or to the public. Sure, they may be doing a fine job, but they are still maybe restrained in lots of areas from fully doing their job.

**4:10**

Albertans deserve consumer protection, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they are not overcharged for utilities and related services. When I read my bill, I wonder, too, how many charges are there, and I just can't figure it out. Most of the time I'm not even in my apartment. Like, you know, I come back after two weeks, three weeks, and I still get the bill for 35, 40, 50 bucks although I haven't used any power, maybe just for the fridge only, and that's it. The interests of the consumers are so important that they should be represented by an office that is independent of the government. Albertans deserve

reliable, understandable consumer information and to have their interests represented at regulatory hearings.

The term of the office of the advocate, I suggest, will be five years, Mr. Speaker, and the Legislative Assembly or the Lieutenant Governor in Council have the ability to suspend or remove the advocate.

The responsibilities of the advocate include but are not limited to representing the interests of electricity and natural gas consumers in proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission and other relevant bodies. They will be providing consumers with independent, impartial information about utilities regulations and enforcement, receiving consumer complaints regarding electricity and natural gas provision by the public utilities, investigating complaints about fairness regarding decisions of the commission, reviewing the government's response to decisions of the commission, and educating consumers about electricity and natural gas. Although I heard that, you know, some of the things are getting done, Mr. Speaker, this is just giving the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate more teeth to do their job properly.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we will not be creating another layer of bureaucracy. That's the main complaint I heard from the hon. members from the other side. It will just give more power to the Utilities Consumer Advocate and make it more open and transparent and protect the consumers of Alberta. For those reasons, I urge all the members of the Legislature to support Bill 206.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The chair shall now put the question.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 206 lost]

### Bill 208 Recall Act

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on Bill 208.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like today is a historic day with the things that have happened, with the MLA being kicked out of caucus, with government out of control. The question is: how do we get control of the people that we've elected? That's what Bill 208, the Recall Act, is all about.

I believe this is one of the most important bills we will debate in the Legislature because it goes to the very heart of what it is we as elected members are entrusted with. This bill is entirely about accountability, accountability to the people who actually elected us to this House. The election of MLAs to this House represents a sacred trust between voters and the individuals they select to be their voice to or within government.

Representative democracy is one of the cornerstones of a free society, and there must be a true connection between citizens and their representatives in order to ensure good government. But what happens when that trust and when that connection is broken? What options do citizens have to restore their voice? Unfortunately, in Alberta the answer to that question is nothing. There's nothing that they can do until the next election.

Under our current system there is no true accountability between MLAs and their constituents between elections. If an MLA does something to break trust, whether that's supporting an unpopular policy, position, or bill or breaking an election promise or has simply proven to be an ineffective representative, citizens are completely powerless to replace the MLA. Let me discuss a few . . .

**Mr. Liepert:** Or cross the floor. Why don't you put that in there?

**Mr. Hinman:** So pass the bill. The hon. Minister of Energy says that they cross the floor. I would say: so pass the bill. We would be happy to vote for it. That's why we're presenting this bill to the House.

Citizens are completely powerless to replace their MLA or the Environment minister, let alone the Energy minister. Let me discuss a few scenarios that I hope will give members pause to consider supporting this bill. Right now an MLA can break an important election promise mere weeks into a five-year mandate, thereby breaking the trust of voters, and not have to face the people who elected him or her until the next election. Perhaps they don't want to be re-elected, so they can go on their own agenda. Those voters would also be forced to live with an MLA whom they can no longer trust. They'll be less inclined to work with that MLA over the duration of the term, and the MLA risks losing touch with his or her community.

Again, MLAs can conceivably lose interest in a job weeks into a five-year term and be missing in action until the next election. That's a long time for citizens to go without proper representation. [interjection] The Energy minister certainly is having his little fits here today, and that's good. He's aware and awake. A great fear of recall, I'm sure. A former health minister. I mean, what a disaster that has been. How many times would he have been recalled if we had had this bill in this sitting?

MLAs may deceive or cover up past actions that would give voters a good reason not to vote for them and face no immediate repercussions should those truths be revealed after they are elected. Unfortunately, politicians who misrepresent themselves to the voters during an election campaign are a fact of life. We could never make a law to outlaw politicians who deceive, but we could certainly make a law that would empower citizens to recall politicians who do. That's what Bill 208 is mainly about, giving citizens a mechanism to ensure good representation between elections and empowering citizens with a way to stop bad bills that are before the House.

There's much more to recall than the actual act of recalling a politician. I believe that having a law in place will lead to a host of improvements in our democracy. Right now, especially under this government, strict caucus discipline has stripped away accountability from MLAs and left their constituents without a proper voice. MLAs are expected to represent party interests first, constituents' interests second if at all. We have seen earlier today what happens when MLAs dare speak out against their own government when that government fails to act in the best interests of the people they represent. They are kicked out of caucus. We saw it last summer with the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. We saw it today with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Under the threat of being recalled, government MLAs might think twice about supporting a bad or unpopular policy or bill. I am sure that there are more than a few members on the other side of this House, particularly in rural areas, who would have voted differently on Bill 50 if their constituents had the power to recall them. There is no question that this government would not have taken years to change the new royalty framework, a very bad piece of legislation. That hurt thousands of Albertans, and many entrepreneurs lost their business.

Bill 50 is actually a perfect example of why recall legislation is urgently needed. This bill bestowed on government the power to unilaterally expropriate lands they deem necessary for power lines. As every rural MLA in this House knows, the bill was massively unpopular. I'm sure every single one of them received calls from their constituents asking them to vote against it. But that's not how

this place works, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't matter what constituents want; it only matters what the party wants. MLAs who were explicitly and overwhelmingly told to defeat the bill ended up supporting it because the accountability is in the wrong place. If that's not dysfunctional democracy, I don't know what is.

Bill 208 would have gone a long way towards Bill 50's rightful defeat. Instead, we are stuck with another bad law, that is foisting billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars on a massive infrastructure project that isn't even needed. Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre just said about adding to that bill: she wonders where all of the add-ons come from.

4:20

The current culture of caucus discipline is contributing to bad legislation. MLAs answer to a small group of political leaders who can and often do devise bad laws and bad policy. We need to make MLAs accountable to their constituents first and foremost. That's exactly what Bill 208 would do.

Some in this House may be concerned that having a recall law could lead to frivolous recall campaigns motivated by more personal reasons than matters of public interest. Bill 208 contains the right safeguards against such instances. A notarized petition with the signatures of 33 per cent of that constituency's population, collected within a 60-day period, must be presented in order for a recall and a by-election to take place. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. This is a very high threshold. There would simply be no way for a personal or narrow-minded recall campaign to garner that kind of support.

Given that 33 per cent often exceeds voter turnout in some Alberta constituencies, this threshold would likely only be reached in the event of an urgent matter of public interest, like Bill 50 or Bill 29, that have been thrown in front of this House. They're thrown out quickly, and there's little time for debate or for people to get forces motivated. To them I would say this. We need to have something in place that makes us accountable to the people who voted for us, not just on election day but on every day in between. As I have explained, there are many reasons why voters may come to realize that they elected the wrong person to represent them in the Legislature, and right now they have no way of making that change.

Accountability is critical in all walks of life, in business, and is, I believe, most important for a great representative government. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the power must rest with the people, not just once every three or five years but every day. When people have no voice, they have no interest. When one has power and authority, one will use it when needed. I would argue that the people of Alberta would engage in politics at a much higher level if they had a process to control elected representatives when they go astray. It seems evident to myself, having been in this House for several years now, that the lack of accountability is our biggest problem. We have elected representatives that, although they may understand the bill, are told by the party: "This is the best we can do. You need to support it. You're not allowed to speak out." Again, we see that we have to suffer here in the province.

I'd like to talk a little bit about our health care system and why accountability is so important. The previous health minister created a superboard, a superdisaster. There was nothing the people of Alberta could do about that, though, until the next election, and that they will do in the next election.

We need accountability when bad bills come forward. There's no way for the people to stop it. Bill 29 is a classic case of where Albertans are outraged, and this government in the short time period of two weeks is going to want to thrust that bill through, and they have the numbers to do it. But if, in fact, the people from Calgary-Shaw want to start a petition tomorrow to recall that minister, I believe that minds would be changed at the level of accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 is about accountability. It's about an open and honest and clear government that is always accountable to the people because the people ultimately hold that power. During an election they turn that over to an elected representative but with recall at any time, for whatever reason. When an MLA is out of touch, they can be recalled and held accountable. That's the most important thing with a good democratic government. Are we and can we be held accountable?

I would urge all members to vote for this. We look forward to the debate and hope that it passes so that we're all more accountable to the people we've been elected to represent.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other hon. members who wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a privilege for me to rise and speak to Bill 208, the Recall Act. I would really like to applaud the Member for Calgary-*Glenmore* for bringing this bill forward as it has given me a great deal to think about and to look at, some of the pros and cons of this tool, which, by all means, would be very appealing to many members of our community.

We look at some of the highlights of this bill. Recall is a procedure whereby constituents have the power to remove a member of the provincial Legislature before his or her term has expired. It is a system where voters can in effect re-elect their representatives in the Legislature through this electoral procedure, this power of removal. It's granted to do a reverse by the people. Depending on which way you see it, this sends more direction to allow individuals to control the members they elect to this Assembly, to have an ability to punish members of this Assembly who, in their view, are not following what the constituents want or, from what they believe, the members of the community want their MLA to do.

There are some proposed safeguards in here. You would need 33 per cent of the eligible voters in a constituency to be required to sign a petition, and they would have to sign it within six months. You wouldn't have a petition that could run for three and a half years, and then all of a sudden: "Hey, we reached that threshold. Finally, we can get rid of the guy." It has to be a concerted effort, put forth in a very short, distinct period of time. So there are some limitations or some safeguards put into this bill.

I would also note that a former Liberal, Mr. Gary Dickson, brought forward a similar measure in 1993. He put forth this initiative, and some people know the history of this. Mr. Dickson was actually the former MLA for Calgary-*Buffalo* and is now working in the hon. minister of housing's home province of Saskatchewan as their Privacy Commissioner. So there are lot of tie-ins here. I also note that Percy Wickman spoke in favour of this bill. His son, Ron Wickman, here in town does tremendous stuff on behalf of the disabled community in designing wheelchair-accessible homes and things of that nature.

Nevertheless, returning to this bill, I do note that some Liberals were in favour of this back in 1993. As I've thought about this, I really have at the end of the day come to it that in our system of government our voters should go to the polls, in my view, knowing that they are going to elect a member for a certain period of time. Recall may allow for, I guess, in certain instances a member to be pulled or something of that nature, but in my view I don't know if it serves the best interests of a democracy under our system of government.

Let me put forward an example. Alberta actually fooled around with this in 1934. The hon. Mr. Aberhart implemented this legisla-

tion in 1937, and then, lo and behold, the first person that it was used against was Mr. Bill Aberhart. Okay. So here you have it. The leader of the province, who immediately tries to do something, immediately has this legislation used against him. You can see times where this will occur to an hon. Premier, whatever party that happens to be, where immediately with an unpopular piece of legislation, something that may have to be directed for the long run, the citizens may for a temporary period disagree with it, and that will raise the ire of 33 per cent of the constituents and hold the Premier to a by-election.

In my view, it would be holding the government hostage from decisions that they would have to make, and it would be in the name of sort of doing it – I can see recall being used countless times: very few government members on the front bench against a government backbencher or, in fact, an opposition backbencher. It would ruin the ebb and flow of our democratic principles.

4:30

In my view, our electorate is smarter than that. They're going to be able to judge an MLA they send to the Legislature on the basis of a four-year term, not on the whims of a one-time bill or their anger of the day. They have a longer view of what, in fact, democracy is. I figure they'll be able to look at a member, look at the government, and say: is this what I want? Sometimes the member they get is the member they elect, and sometimes the government they get is the government they elect, and that's the way it goes. I simply don't see for the betterment of democracy or the smoothness of actually running what is often a difficult business, running a province, that to allow this bill to go through would make it any easier.

Nevertheless, I do applaud the member, and I did think long and hard on this. There were some advantages. But at the end of the day, although I might sometimes disagree with the government of the day, I have no doubt the belief is that it is very difficult to govern, and this wouldn't make it any easier.

I thank you for allowing me to speak on this issue. I would urge all members to speak against the proposal for those reasons I have listed, but I applaud the member for bringing the action nonetheless.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the next hon. member on my list is the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and debate at second reading Bill 208, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This is a very hard-working member of this Assembly, and I respect his comments while I may disagree with them. The bill sets out a procedure by which an elected MLA could lose his or her seat in the Assembly based on a petition signed by 33 per cent of the electorate in any electoral division. I want to again thank the people that assisted the member who sponsored this bill, but I cannot support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I've listened with great interest to the argument from the bill's sponsor as well as from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I find it interesting that the member makes this passionate call for recall when all the members sitting next to him had the opportunity to make their own recall instead of crossing the floor. Interestingly enough, using Alberta's current electoral process would have given voters the choice of who their representatives in the House should be rather than them simply moving from one party to another. There's a very little bit of irony in this that I again find interesting to observe.

There's quite a bit of history on recall in this province, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has alluded to. Interestingly enough,

when I was doing some research on this, I found out that *Hansard*, in fact, only goes back to 1971. It's very difficult to get anything from *Hansard* before 1971. I did find a bit of information from 1972, though, from a very distinguished member of this House who was a former cabinet minister under the Social Credit government. *Hansard* April 6, 1972:

I am just going to say this, if you put all the silly little arguments aside, and if you think about it, maybe the people would like to know that there is an election every four years. We have already pointed out that the campaigning starts the minute this House starts.

I have to say that I would agree with that. The next election does begin the day after the previous one. Of course, we're about two and a half years into this cycle, here. I have to say that these are very wise words.

The point: the current system holds all members accountable to their constituents. We're all accountable on a daily basis. If we decide to run again, we're all accountable on the day of the next election. I agree with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The voters often are a lot smarter than the media or whoever else may give them credit for. They're ultimately our bosses. The words that I was speaking earlier, though, speak to the concept that Albertans make their decisions in the totality on the slate of candidates' own position on the issues when they vote in an election. Bill 208, I would have to say with respect, flies in the face of the point being made by the member that I quoted from 1972. His confidence, rather, was that the electoral system was evident in its words.

As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo stated, it was the same Social Credit Party that brought in recall legislation and then moved it out when they were, in fact, the governing party. Well, I guess they recalled the recall. Obviously, that's not how it was intended. History has actually shown that when recall is initiated on a particular issue and not really on specific actions of an elected member – I look no further than our neighbours to the west around the issue of their harmonized sales tax. That's been a very difficult point in that government. Of course, in Alberta we have no sales tax, and we'll bring in no sales tax. They actually did bring in a harmonized sales tax, and now a special-interest group is utilizing B.C.'s recall process to target government MLAs. I don't agree with a sales tax, Mr. Speaker, but it doesn't make for a very stable government when you're only debating that one single issue. I doubt that the B.C. government is actually getting anything done at this given time. So the motivation that they have behind the recall in B.C. right now is, again, the issue and not necessarily the conduct of the members in that Assembly. This is a consideration that I hoped the sponsor of this bill could have clarified a little bit more in his earlier comments.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to raise one more point on the merits of the current system of electing or, in this case, removing members from this Assembly. There are currently four major parties in Alberta, so theoretically you could win an election with 26 per cent of the vote. At any given time you could theoretically have 74 per cent of the people wanting you out. This is a recipe for absolute electoral anarchy. This is democracy in action, the current system that we have, and I believe Albertans see more merit in ballots cast than signatures on a petition. I know I'm not alone in this sentiment.

I am a former member of the federal Canadian Alliance party and, of course, still a member of the Conservative Party of Canada. At one of their first conventions in Montreal – I believe it was in March of 2005 – the issue of a recall policy was put before the members. I actually got up to speak against it at that time as well. We were successful; it was actually removed. It's not something that's palatable in a nation or in a province. It may look good on paper, but it's not something that has ever been good in practice in this country. I raise this point as arguments will be made that other

jurisdictions have recall, so I guess we have to follow that one as well. B.C.'s, as I mentioned, came in 1991, when Mike Harcourt had taken over.

So with respect to the member for Calgary-Glenmore, Mr. Speaker, my argument is backed again that other jurisdictions have removed recall or that recall has not been a successful circumstance in that particular jurisdiction. This is a concept that may seem appealing to some but may not serve the best interests of the voters.

I'm not going to make a financial argument because that's like saying democracy is costly. It does cost money to heat this building, to pay all of our salaries, to go to the polls. I'm not going to make that argument. This in and of itself is not good for the democratic process.

I'm sure other members in this House will debate recall in other jurisdictions again, but I don't think that that's a good comparison. There are a number of instances where an elected official was recalled but only to be re-elected in a subsequent by-election, and there are also just a few points of consideration for Bill 208, as I had mentioned.

I'd like to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this bill forward. His commitment to democracy is laudable, but I respectfully say again that this is not something that we should be pursuing in Alberta. I'd like to again acknowledge the people who helped draft this bill. They no doubt also have a passion for citizen engagement, and I'm happy to have this debate at all. That notwithstanding, I'm going to reiterate my position of not supporting this legislation and indicate that the when three members of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore's caucus, to my knowledge, were part of the government caucus either this term or in the past, I was unable to find anything of when they were in favour of recall.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That ending was perfect because I'm going to remind him of when I did speak in the Legislature on the issue of recall.

It's my honour to speak to Bill 208, the Recall Act, put forward by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This bill will allow constituents to recall an MLA who has failed to live up to their promises. Legislation like this has been proposed in the House in the past. Are you listening? I spoke for it then, and I speak for it now.

In 1996, Dr. Nicol, then the Member for Lethbridge-East, put forward Bill 206, and I had this to say.

I believe there is no better way to meet the concerns of Albertans about accountability in political life, and it proves to our voters that we take their concerns and their views seriously. Bill 206 in my mind will help put the trust of the electorate back into the Legislature.

If there's one thing I believe in after all my time in government, it's accountability. If someone doesn't deliver on their promises, they should lose their privileges.

**4:40**

Bill 208 addresses the weaknesses in our system. It allows not only the members to stand up but the people of Alberta to stand up and be heard. The bar is set quite high by the contents of this bill. Some will say: won't we have numerous elections? No. The recall bill will require 33 per cent of eligible voters. Another obstacle to recall is the issue of money. To be truly grassroots, you need to keep money as separate as possible, and the member that just spoke brought that up. The rules are clear in this bill. No one can be paid. We can't have a process hijacked by special interests. People are concerned about money in regular politics. It can't be said that

money will control the recall process; it will be truly a grassroots movement.

People who are against this bill make an argument to me all the time. They say: you wouldn't have crossed the floor if this bill was in place. Of course I would have. If this bill was in place, I would have done the same thing all over again. I followed my convictions, and the people of Calgary-Fish Creek would have supported me.

I can tell you what would have been different if a bill like this was in place. This government wouldn't have passed some of the legislation it did. Bill 50 took the rights from property owners, and it put them in the hands of cabinet. Public consultation has been reduced to the point of uselessness. Rural Albertans are furious. Quite frankly, a lot of government members wouldn't have voted for that bill if this legislation was in place.

The people of British Columbia have had legislation in place for years. The power of recall is obvious to everyone. The current government in British Columbia misled the people it was supposed to represent. Because of its laws upset citizens didn't have to wait until another election. They could take action right away, and they did. The momentum that built has led to the Premier of British Columbia resigning. I know how much that must scare this government, and it should.

As I travel this great province, I hear frustration all over the place. Many have put their frustration to great use. The Wildrose caucus stands here today stronger than ever because of the fears this government has for the people of Alberta. I find it strange, though, that people have to start an entirely new party to make real change and impact in politics. It shouldn't be that way. I talk to my constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek, and they can't believe how hard it is to get real representatives in the Legislature. What constituents want is an elected member that stands up for what they believe in. They want a member that is accountable, and quite frankly the people aren't getting what they want or they're not getting what they need.

The current health care debate is an example. The member for Edmonton-Meadowlark voiced his concerns over the way the emergency room crisis was being handled for over two years. The member is still an emergency doctor. He knows the issues intimately and expertly, yet he was silenced by this government and now given the boot. How very sad. There is no issue closer to the hearts of myself and Albertans than health care.

The government has shot down recall legislation before. Why is it so afraid to allow the recall of a member? I think it's because they realize that the power rests with government when it should be in the hands of the people. The grassroots are where the real Albertans are. They're not in the Premier's office. My constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek tell me that they want a member that truly represents their issues. This Legislature is based upon the fact that one member represents one area. While they are free to contact any MLA, their first point of contact is the member's office in their constituency. Albertans take pride in their communities, and they take pride in their neighbourhoods. It means something to have a spokesperson for their area. Even if a constituent voted for a party that did not win in their riding, they still take great pride in being part of that political process. They want to say to this MLA that they're proud of him or they're proud of her. But sometimes they lose respect and pride. There are some people that get into office and don't take it seriously. Sometimes they just ran for the party and didn't expect to win. Maybe they just didn't know what they were getting into. Other times they are just really selfish. They want the perks of the office, and they forget about the important responsibilities.

So what are constituents supposed to do? We have a first past the post system. A member doesn't need to win a majority of the votes.

They just need one more vote than second place. No system is perfect, but people certainly want to know why improvements aren't being made. The people of Alberta don't want to wait four or five years for another general election. It is said in politics that a week is an eternity. We've been in the session less than one month, and much has happened just on the health care file. Years is too long to wait when the people are being let down by their MLAs. Quite frankly, the people in this province demand better. Some MLAs misrepresent themselves in the public square. There is a great deal of power that is entrusted to this Assembly. Some bad apples out there will do or say anything to get in. What happens if someone lies and gets elected based on these lies and then the truth is revealed mid-term? Public pressure is a powerful force, but the rule of law is stronger.

The people I talk to want engaged representation. When there are five years between elections, it is easy for an elected member to lose enthusiasm for the job mid-term. Motivation isn't a problem for me because I, quite frankly, am more energetic than ever, but it's easy to get comfortable and ride out the term. Albertans demand safeguards in law that ensure that they have the best representation that they can get.

In closing, I fully support Bill 208, the Recall Act. I supported legislation like this before, and I continue to do so now. When Albertans are outraged, they deserve a democratic outlet, not a letter to the editor. If a member doesn't do the job they promised to do, Albertans need a way to get rid of them.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I have on my list, in the sequence of the notes I received, the hon. members for Edmonton-Centre, Lethbridge-West, Airdrie-Chestermere, Calgary-Mackay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to get up and speak in second reading to Bill 208, the Recall Act, proposed by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I think this discussion is part of a wider discussion that is reflecting the public's perception that they don't have control over their elected official. We're certainly witnessing this Tea Party phenomena in the U.S., but as I listen to what they're actually asking for or expecting, we get not very clear direction. Frankly, I don't know that what's being suggested by that group is very helpful to their elected representative in trying to represent them. I do see this as part of a larger issue around people's misunderstanding or lack of understanding around how the process works and their frustration that they can't make their elected person change the way they're presenting or reacting to an issue.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore started out by saying: "Well, there's nothing the public can do. That's it. They're stuck for five years. Shut the door. It's over." I just don't find that to be the case. I think, you know, that where I've had people complain to me about the actions of a member, whether in the government caucus or in my caucus, I've directed them to the whip, who has a job that is about ensuring discipline in caucus, but that also means the discipline of the caucus and making sure that their members are representing them well outside of that caucus.

I can think of examples where there was an elected member who didn't keep office hours and was very hard to get hold of. There was a fuss made in that government caucus to the individual, and he was told that he should have an accessible office, where people didn't have to phone up and make an appointment. I can think of other ones where there have been complaints about it. I mean, let's be realistic here. I think that the public does have a number of different

ways of trying to achieve some kind of resolution if they're very unhappy with the way their elected member is responding to them. The whip is one of them.

Complaining to the leader is another one. Again, that leader doesn't want the hassle. We actually had somebody thrown out of my caucus because they just took up so much of the leader's time in trying to resolve the difficulties that this person had created that finally they were asked to leave the caucus that I'm in. So appealing to the leader is another way.

4:50

You can appeal to the other caucus members. I think that if I'm hearing things correctly today, there was a decision made by caucus to discipline one of their members. In a larger parliamentary way there's the – I'm not going to get the name of this committee right – privileges and elections, printing and something committee, which is a formal way that you can protest the behaviour of one of our elected members. A committee does review their actions, and there is discipline meted out from that.

Never underestimate the power of public pressure. Never. I've seen public pressure turn all kinds of things around in politics in Alberta, you know, and with the public pressure, if there is enough public pressure, along with that always comes media spotlight. That can certainly change someone's behaviour or have them back off or be able to help the caucus or the whip or whatever convince the individual that that's not the direction that they want to be going in or that they're not representing people adequately.

So to say that there's nothing that people can do, I just don't buy that. There is lots that people can do and do do, and I have examples of everything, actually, that I just discussed there.

I heard another member talk about, "Well, you know, you can get elected and just disengage after a few weeks," which strikes me as very odd. I'm sure that all those that are from the class of 2008 would agree with me that you don't even know what's going on after a few weeks, never mind disengaging. You're full of things that you need to learn and do and fill out and get on top of. It's a beehive of activity, so I don't know how you could disengage unless it was with the assistance of some sort of chemically altering something. I can't see you disengaging after a few weeks or, you know, even after a few years.

I mean, what I've seen is that it takes you a good couple of years to really learn the rules here, where you start to groove along with the Routine and the rhythm of the House. You might get to that point and go: "You know what? I really hate this stuff. I've learned how to do it, and it just does not work for me." Fair enough. I've had a caucus member that felt that way. He still tootled along for the remaining year and a half doing his job and then just didn't run again. But the idea that someone would just check out – well, if they're that miserable, they're going to quit the darn job and go and do something else. They're not going to sit there in the back row twiddling their thumbs and being grumpy. Why would you bother? Life is too short.

Or even the idea that someone didn't expect to get elected and then did get elected. Again, I've served with individuals. I remember looking at one person on election night, and I thought: wow, their eyes are like saucers. You know how they talk about how somebody's eyes are like saucers? This guy's eyes were like saucers. He clearly did not think he was going to get elected. He did, and he was the most engaged, energetic, enthusiastic member of my caucus for that term. You know, why would you run if you didn't want to get elected? I'm sorry, but that just seems such an enormous amount of time and energy and money and that of your family. Why on earth would you get into that if you didn't at least have some ideas of what you would do when you got elected?

I've checked their petitioning process, that's described in Bill 208, against some of the others, and 33 per cent is not a high enough percentage. Most of the good – well, no; let me be careful here. I would venture to say that if you look at how many members were elected by around 50 per cent, you've got people that are on the right vibe with their constituency. They do reflect the views of the people who've elected them, and they're going to weather that storm.

I am so fortunate and so honoured to represent the people in Edmonton-Centre, who are an unending source of enthusiasm and advice and guidance for me, and I so love representing them. We're on pretty much the same vibe, so we don't counter each other. Actually, never. I get a few people who disagree with the way I've gone on something, but overwhelmingly I get people saying: "That's what we wanted. Thank you very much. That's exactly where you want us to go." So I think that the recall of 33 per cent is far too low.

The other part of this is around that package. The only part of that kind of Tea Party, democratic, far right-wing package I hear talked about that I am interested in is citizen initiatives, which gets an idea onto the floor of the Assembly. On the other stuff, about proposals, I just look to the U.S. and go: they're in gridlock in California because of those direct proposals and direct votes.

Look at what Envision Edmonton did to the city of Edmonton, for God's sake, and how much money it cost us for a petition process that was not even in order. What you end up with, bottom line, is that the one with the most money wins, and that is not democracy. So I find that this package of stuff, which includes recall, generally comes from people who want things their way, and they will get money behind them to make it their way, and that to me is not democracy. You should be able to have a good debate with no money on either side. These usually involve somebody pushing a particular idea who's got the money to get it out there, who's got the money to hire the people, the office to print the stuff. That's not why we're in here.

I'm not in favour of Bill 208. You gathered that.  
Thank you.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can see by the clock that I won't have too long to speak before we move into motions, so I'll be very brief. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing forward Bill 208, the Recall Act.

In starting my discussion, I want to talk about something that happened in Lethbridge, and it was a very unfortunate event. A little over a month ago we had a municipal election, and we had a group of municipal councillors elected. During that election the public was very clear that they wanted to see some change and that they wanted some things to happen. We had a gentleman that was duly elected, in fact, in second place with very strong support, and before being able to be sworn in, the gentleman passed away. It's never happened before in Alberta. Mr. Robert Babki, an attorney, retired in Lethbridge, a family man and a grandfather and a lawyer and a community advocate who put his heart and his life into running for council, passed away, and they had the memorial service today.

I'm only bringing this up because it bears very much on the issue at hand. Since that has happened, I have had innumerable calls. I have e-mails, I have people coming into my office, and each and every one of them says the same thing. They say: "Greg, you know, with all due respect, we just had an election. We selected the people we want to serve us. We don't need to be spending another hundred thousand dollars to run another election. We have had our say." I believe that's what Albertans believe. We're a fiscally responsible

province. I'm a fiscally responsible conservative, as is this party. I believe that I fit very nicely with the views of the people in this province that are fiscally responsible, and those folks have told me that they don't believe that those kinds of expenditures are appropriate. They would prefer to see us do our job to represent the citizens.

I believe that a big part of it – and I agree with what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said and Edmonton-Centre as well – is that it's so critically important to listen to the people you represent. It's about doing the job the best you can, and you can't be held ransom to small interest groups or to making one decision that's maybe a little bit unpopular. You have to be able to do what's right. You have to be able to do what's best. Every four years the citizens have an opportunity to weigh all of the things that you did: the good, the things they agreed with, the things they didn't. They can view whether or not they believed that you listened carefully to what they said, and then based on all of that, they're going to make a decision whether you have a right to represent them again or not. I believe that it's critically important that that position be held, that we have the opportunity to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I won't be voting in favour of Bill 208, and I would ask all of the other members to please vote against it as well. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** It's 5 o'clock, so the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded. We'll continue Bill 208 at the next opportunity.

#### 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

#### Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program

512. Mr. Vandermeer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection and maintenance program requiring vehicles to undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and open debate on Motion 512. This would ultimately help improve the air quality in Alberta. Undergoing vehicle inspection and repairs would benefit the environment.

In 2002 Climate Change Central completed a study examining methods for potential greenhouse gas reductions on Alberta roads. The study focused on vehicle inspections and maintenance programs. Unfortunately, despite emissions standards for new vehicles becoming more stringent over the last two decades, urban air quality has not improved. According to Climate Change Central this discrepancy probably occurs because after two years of use vehicles no longer meet the original standards. This decline can arise for several reasons such as failure to adhere to a manufacturer's maintenance schedule; improper adjustments of fuel mixture, spark timing, or other engine emission parameters; premature failure of emission control devices; and/or deliberate removal or disabling of emission control devices.

An IM program can help avoid these problems. Mr. Speaker, there are many versions of IM programs. There isn't one set way to implement the program. There are more than 35 IM programs in the United States, and there are two in Canada. The two programs in Canada are in Ontario and British Columbia. These two programs have similarities but also very many differences. I am not proposing that we adopt the IM programs in Ontario or B.C. This motion is

merely urging the government to consider implementing a vehicle IM program that requires vehicles to undergo inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

Motion 512 does not get into specifics, but there are a few options available. For instance, one option would identify vehicles that have higher emissions output than normal vehicles of the same age and type and would require that they be repaired prior to the transfer of title. This option would reduce smog-causing emissions from vehicles that are 10 years or older by having them undergo inspections and necessary repairs. There could also be a program for heavy-duty vehicles such as large trucks and buses and a program for light-duty vehicles. This would include passenger cars, vans, light trucks, and sport-utility vehicles. Licensed technicians would perform the inspections at licensed vehicle facilities. This would mean an automotive repair facility or service stations with repair shops.

The IM program would also exempt certain vehicles from the program as well as include a repair cost limit and a conditional pass to recognize that there are some owners who cannot afford to fully repair vehicles that do not meet emissions standards. The repair cost limit would ensure that motor vehicle emissions are lowered while limiting the financial burden upon the vehicle owners. Vehicle exemptions would take into account that not all vehicles should fall under the program.

Mr. Speaker, again, these are just options. The specific program details would be left to the government to decide. With this motion I would like to start the debate around implementing an IM program that would ultimately improve Alberta's ambient air quality. Moreover, not only is the health of our environment important but also the health of Albertans. This motion may help ensure that smog does not become a serious health issue in the future.

Furthermore, licensed inspection technicians may find safety issues with the vehicle while performing the emissions inspections. If vehicles are inspected, deficiencies are more likely to be caught and fixed. This could include faulty brakes or engine problems, which would seriously put the driver and passengers at risk if not caught and repaired.

Mr. Speaker, this motion would benefit the environment, health of our future generations, and improve the quality of the vehicles on Alberta roads. For this reason I am proposing Motion 512 and look forward to the comments of my colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I just want to acknowledge that I saw a few members. I have a list here: Edmonton-Centre, Airdrie-Chestermere, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Calgary-Glenmore, Strathcona, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Hinman:** As well as Calgary-Fish Creek.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All right. I'll add on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to my feet and support a motion brought forward by the government member from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This is an idea that is well used in other places, it's not costly to implement, and it very much falls in line with the kinds of things that we've been suggesting from the Liberal caucus, the Official Opposition caucus, for some time.

Part of what I've been trying to get people to understand is that you don't have to spend a ton of money to reduce your impact on the planet and on greenhouse gases. Often I find that the government

doesn't get involved in things because it seems like such an overwhelming, big project with so much money involved, but it doesn't have to be. Frankly, the way to tackle a really big project is usually by breaking it down and doing it incrementally. This is an excellent idea for an incremental change.

We've seen them operating in other places. The one I looked at was Ontario's drive clean, which is a mandatory vehicle emissions testing program very similar to what the member has already been describing. There's a light-duty drive clean. There are exemptions for that. There's an appeals process if people disagree. There's a heavy-duty vehicle program. There are testing requirements for model, year of vehicle, et cetera, et cetera. It's been running for quite a while there, and, you know, we should be able to take advantage of their best practices.

There are others in the country if we want to look at them, B.C.'s as well. Their program is called AirCare and has been running since 1992. So they've had lots of practice at this.

I think there are other things that can also be done by the government that's in the same level of an incremental change, a fairly small change, and a personal change that individuals can take on. It has been my experience that the public is very willing to do stuff. They really understand the issue and the impact of use of fossil fuels and are willing to do quite a bit. The challenge to us as legislators seems to be about designing programs that are accessible enough and easy enough, if I can use that word, that people will take it on.

As an example, I'll talk about the city of Edmonton's recycling program. You know, aside from the opportunity it gives me to boast about the city of Edmonton's world-renowned recycling and composting program, we learned a lot of lessons from that. When people were initially asked to separate paper and other kinds of paper like your cardboard and tin cans and plastic, some people took it up. But it didn't get a huge, enthusiastic uptake on it. You know, it did require some thought. You had to get the right kind of bins. Then somebody would steal the damn bins from the back of your house. So it didn't work as well as they had hoped.

**5:10**

Then you could mix it up a bit more. Finally, they said: "You know what? We're spending so much time going through the way people have separated this and fixing it, we might as well just do it from the get-go." So they started a blue bag program. The blue bags are available at every store. Glad makes them. All kinds of well-known names make the blue bags. All we ask is that they're blue. The householder or the individual can use those blue bags. They just put all of their recyclable stuff in it. The paper, the cardboard, the metal, the plastic: just chuck it all in there. Don't separate it. Don't fuss about it. You don't have to squish it or anything like that. Just put it in the darn blue bag and put it out back with the garbage. That worked because it was really, really easy. It was easy to get the bags. It was easy to do it. You just put it out back at the same time as the garbage. All of a sudden the uptake on this program was amazing.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If we do the same kind of thing with vehicles – and this does require people to actually take their vehicle somewhere, you know, to a recognized location, to have these particular tests and suggestions done – and find ways to make it as easy as possible for folks, there will be enormous uptake on it.

Just a couple of other things that I want to mention that I think go hand in hand with this. Actually reducing people's use of fossil fuel driven vehicles is also a part of this, working with municipalities



around cycling and walking infrastructure for people to use those venues as commuting, not just recreational, not just walk to the store but actually walk to work or cycle to work. You can cycle to work quite a distance, but it's no fun when you've got to battle the semis on the same road and deal with the potholes and the gravel. You are looking at a different infrastructure here. Again, incremental movements really help. The bikes that you can buy are made for this kind of riding. A lot of things have changed along with this.

That's also what's happening to the vehicle. We will slowly move out of this, and eventually we will all be here with either hybrid cars or probably electric cars or some other version of biofuel cars. I don't know how long that's going to be, but it will start to move in that direction. Really, what we're trying to do with the cars that would fall under what's been proposed here by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is to take the worst offenders, which are, generally speaking, older cars, and try and get people to get them tested and make use of the suggestions.

While I'm at it, the easy part of this is the regular maintenance of your vehicle. One of the biggest problems is underinflated tires for bad car mileage. Now, this is not hard. People should be able to keep their tires inflated to a proper pressure. If you don't know how to do it, just ask, and some helpful soul will help you on how to measure and get it up. That's one of the worst offenders for getting better mileage on your car.

The other one is changing your oil so that the engine runs properly. Again, it's not difficult because in this day and age unless you really want to change your own oil, which you can do, generally speaking you drive into a place and somebody does it while you read the paper, and you drive out the other side, and it's done. This, again, is pretty easy. If you do it on a regular schedule – you know, every spring and fall or whatever – and use the proper kind of multigrade oil that the manufacturer is suggesting for that particular vehicle, you're way ahead of the curve on this one. You've already done a lot to have a better running, cleaner running vehicle that gets better mileage and puts less crap into the air.

I was going to make one other suggestion in that, checking all of the other systems, which again they'll do at the same time as you go through the oil changing place. They will check various other levels of stuff that you put in your car and check the tail lights and all of those kinds of things, brake systems. That will also assist you.

As we look at what we can all do here, I think this is an excellent suggestion. It is incremental. If we combine that with things like cycling and walking infrastructure, with things like using the Green TRIP money for more LRTs in the urban areas, for more public transit in urban and in rural areas – let's even go further and look at high-speed rail, especially if we look at the maglev system, the magnetic levitation system.

We should also consider lower speed vehicles to be allowed on the streets. Right now we don't, but as we start to consider – and they're running some pilot projects of having lower speed limits in certain districts – that may possibly work in with that as well.

So I do encourage everyone to support the member's Motion 512. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, then Calgary-Glenmore, then Strathcona.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to stand up and speak to this motion. I will not be supporting this motion. This is being penny-wise and pound-foolish. A bill that comes stemming from this motion, the only people this is really going to affect, in my view, depending on how the bill was written, of course, are the people who can least afford it.

You know, we talk a lot about being competitive in Alberta and making sure we have a low tax regime and so forth, and obviously that's important. Businesses drive the economy, small businesses drive the economy, and we need that. But we also have to be wary, of course, of those who are struggling and who don't have a lot of money.

I remember when I was – it wasn't too long ago; I guess 12 years ago – in university. My wife and I were just newlyweds at the time. We didn't have much. We didn't have hardly anything. We lived down in the U.S. at the time, that was where I did my undergrad school. In that state they had a law that was similar to this; in other words, it was an emissions standards law. You had to go in every year, and you had to get your car checked. They would stick a rod up the tailpipe, and you'd run your car, and they would check how your emissions were.

Anyway, I had an old, old car. I can't even remember what it was. It was just a terrible vehicle. It would overheat all of the time. It was used. It was probably at the time at least 15, 16, 17 years old. It was just an absolute clunker, but it was cheap. I got it for like 500 bucks, so I was using it. I mean, we were living on basically student loans, and I worked part-time at a hockey arena. You know, you're trying to put yourself through school and all that sort of thing. That was something we valued in our family, to kind of pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get yourself through school and so forth because you would appreciate it more. So we tried to do that through scholarships and working and living frugally.

I remember it was very frustrating because, you know, there would be hardly anything left at the end of the month to do anything with. We certainly didn't go to many movies or much of that sort of thing. We really were struggling to put money together. A big part of the maintenance, of course, was this car that would keep overheating. Of course, I bought all of the manuals so that I could try to repair it as much as possible on my own. I'm a hopeless mechanic, so it wasn't a very fruitful exercise.

#### 5:20

I do remember one time when I went in there, and they said – first, we had to spend the money. It wasn't a ton of money, but for me it was a ton of money at the time. It was like 50 bucks to get this thing checked. The first time was fine, but the second year I remember going back to get it checked because you had to do it annually, and it failed the test. So I had to get some work done on it, and I just simply could not afford it. I actually had to take out a loan from my parents. It wasn't very much. I think it was only like 400 bucks or 500 bucks, but I had to take out a loan and get it repaired. The exhaust system needed some patching up, so we got that done. Of course, I'm lucky that my parents could afford to give me a \$500 loan. I certainly know that there are many people out there that can't afford that and that don't have people that they can just go ask for money from.

I really think that all this law is, essentially, is a fee on the poor, people who can least afford it, seniors that have fixed incomes who are driving older cars. I think of my grandparents right now on a fixed income. They drive a very old car. They keep it up meticulously as much as possible. It's a very old car, and I doubt it has very good emissions standards, but they use it. They make do with it, and that's good. They can't afford to have an extra 50 bucks a year to inspect the thing, and then who knows what the repair costs would be if it was a problem.

Again, to me, I understand the spirit of the bill. No one likes smog in our cities. I know that California has these same tests. They have a huge smog problem. I understand that. I really do. I

think the intentions behind it are noble. I'm not decrying that. I know that this hon. member, for a fact, wouldn't do anything that would intentionally hurt people, certainly not the poor. I know that's not the intent of this legislation, but I think that the unintended consequences of this bill are that. It will do very little to help our environment.

I mean, most people can afford to drive cars that are either new or new used, I guess you could say, five years or newer. Most people can afford to purchase cars like that, and those cars have, you know, very little emissions that go out of their tailpipes relative to older model cars and trucks and vehicles. So this won't affect most of us. It depends, of course, on what the bill says eventually, if it gets implemented. If it's a bill that says that we have to get an annual emissions check, then that's going to be a huge pain for Albertans. It's 50 bucks out of everyone's pocket every year, or, depending on it, it might be even more. I'm not really sure what the charge is for that right now. It's probably higher than 50 bucks. That's what it was back when I was in school.

I would suggest that it would mean an extra tax on everybody, but the people that could least afford it are the people on small incomes. On top of that, if problems were discovered with the emissions, the people that would have the most problems passing these emissions standards tests would be people who aren't wealthy, who aren't even middle income. It would be poor people, people that have older cars. So I really think that if this was ever turned into a bill, you know, it would hurt the people that can least afford it.

There's also the question, too, of big government and intrusive government. It seems that every time we turn around in this Legislature, there's a new law that is being proposed that limits our freedoms or takes away our rights. We see this with property rights legislation: bills 50, 36, and 19. We see this with, my belief is, although, respectfully, I know that the Wildrose caucus had two that voted for and two that voted against, Bill 16, the cellphone law. Of course, we have free votes in this caucus. I know it's a novel concept. The point is that there's the safety vest registry. You know, you have all these different laws and initiatives that are coming forward that I believe are just too far. It's just Big Brother wanting to do too much and getting too involved in our lives.

This is just a little thing, right? It's an emissions check. It seems harmless enough, right? I mean, you've got people who want to make sure that we don't have smog and pollution in the air. But let's be clear what this is. I mean, this is a very small percentage of vehicles that would not meet these tests, but they would literally all be confined to people who probably could least afford it. I just think that that's the wrong way to go about it.

If we want to curb emissions of all kinds – pollutants, emissions of all kinds – then what we need to be looking at is, obviously, more mass transit. I think it's a very good idea, work towards that. That means properly funding our municipalities and decentralizing a lot of decision-making with regard to infrastructure to our municipalities. That would allow them to put in place the types of mass transit infrastructure that would have a real positive effect on reducing emissions, reducing smog, reducing particulates and other pollution, and then . . . [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Before I call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, might we revert briefly to the introduction of some very special guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

## Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

**The Speaker:** Thank you very much. In all three galleries – the public, the members', and the Speaker's galleries – are municipal representatives. They come from a number of municipalities just a little north of the city of Edmonton. I'd like to introduce them to you. They are here this week to attend the 2010 Alberta Urban Municipalities Association convention, taking place in Edmonton November 23-25, and I'm just really delighted that they've taken time out of their convention schedule to be with us today. As I call on them, if they would rise: from the town of Barrhead, led by His Worship Mayor Brian Schulz, a delegation of municipal representatives; from the town of Westlock, led by His Worship Bruce Lennon, a number of representatives from that municipality; from the town of Morinville, led by Deputy Mayor Paul Krauskopf; from the town of Swan Hills; from the town of Legal, led by His Worship Albert St. Jean; and from the village of Clyde, led by Deputy Mayor Diana Vosseler. I'd ask them all to rise now and receive the very, very warm recognition of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly.

## Motions Other than Government Motions

### Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program

(*continued*)

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

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak with respect to Motion 512. I just want to repeat it because it's the wording of the motion that leads me to want to support it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection and maintenance program requiring vehicles to undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

The intention of the motion, obviously, is to encourage the government to implement a vehicle inspection and maintenance program, or an IM program as I'll refer to it, and may then require vehicles to undergo regular inspections or repairs when necessary. The program would identify vehicles that have higher emissions outputs, perhaps because of comparison to other vehicles of the same age or type. I know that, as we've already heard actually, there could be concerns about this motion, concerns about this kind of an initiative for reasons of cost, inconvenience, possibly even difficulty in implementing. But I think it's a motion worthy of our careful consideration because what it's doing is urging the government to consider implementing such a program, and given the challenges we have with our environment and health issues and so on, I think it's reasonable that we should be taking a close look at this.

There are many possibilities as to how such a program could be implemented; for example, regular annual inspections, which I can see some people having concerns about. I do understand, however, that it's not uncommon for even vehicles of only a couple of years in age quickly becoming inefficient and having problems in terms of their emissions, so that may be an argument for fairly regular checks.

5:30

Another way, I think, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has suggested, is possibly when ownership of a vehicle is being transferred. That would be a sound way to make sure vehicles are being checked at least periodically. I guess the question is: is it worth the cost, the inconvenience, and some might say, the hassle?

I would say that it's, again, pretty much accepted that vehicle emissions are a significant source of pollution, certainly in our province and most definitely in other jurisdictions. In Alberta's urban areas vehicles account for approximately 40 per cent of nitrogen oxides and 30 per cent of volatile organic compound emissions. Province-wide vehicles account for approximately 15 per cent of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compound emissions. These inspections are important because, obviously, the fewer vehicle emissions, the better the ambient air quality, and improving air quality is certainly something that's essential in protecting our environment and improving public health. Reducing unnecessary greenhouse emissions through such a program would help decrease ground-level ozone and smog, and we know that those are hazards that have been linked to acid rain and other forms of environmental damage. It's also worth noting that our population in Alberta is increasing, so this could become an increasingly serious issue.

But it's not only an environmental issue; it's certainly linked to the health of Albertans as well. Obviously, poor air quality makes it harder for a person to breathe. It can irritate an individual's lungs and airways, worsen chronic diseases such as heart disease, bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma. These are severe health issues that can be a huge burden on the lives of Albertans. Asthma alone is one of the leading chronic diseases for Alberta children, for example, and it's also very harmful to lungs and bronchial tubes. Air pollution can play a major role in asthma due to the fact that children breathe faster and spend more time outdoors doing strenuous activities. I understand that studies have shown that even modest increases in air pollution can cause small but measurable increases in emergency room visits and hospital admissions.

The point I'm trying to make is that even a small improvement in air quality would be beneficial to the people in our province. If an inspection and maintenance program can help reduce these greenhouse emissions and improve our air quality, then I believe that a program like this may be justifiable. Obviously, however, it wouldn't be the only solution. It would be one of a range of things that we have to do and remain vigilant on in order to maintain air quality in the province. I believe that it certainly bears further scrutiny, and that's why I'm going to support this motion.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** There are five additional speakers that I have on my list, and we'll go forward with the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then Strathcona, then Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, then Calgary-McCall, then Calgary-Fish Creek. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing forward this motion. I know that it's with great concern for the environment and the desire to make things better here in the province that this motion has been brought forward. I'd just like to speak a little bit, though, on the depth and the scope of this motion and the problems that it would cause. Like I say, I can understand his desire for it, but I cannot vote for this motion because of, I believe, the damage that it will cause to those who can least afford to take their vehicles through an inspection station.

There are a very small number of people who actually drive these older vehicles. There are probably a larger number of vintage vehicles in the province than there are old vehicles on the road that are operating poorly. I know, you know, back in the '70s and '80s when you were driving in town, we saw lots of puffers and smoke coming out, and it was appalling. You'd get behind some of these vehicles, and it would choke you up. But it's not a common

dilemma that I see on the roads very often anymore, and when I do see a vehicle that's old and rusted out and running poorly, usually you can identify with the person driving that vehicle that they're doing this as a last resort, that this is the only thing they can own and operate because of the circumstances that they're in.

To me, when you generally look at people that are doing things that we might think, "Oh, let's raise the standards and stop them from doing those activities," there are generally two reasons why they do that. One is a lack of education. I think we're doing a great job here in the province of educating people about the importance of having a well-run vehicle. You know, if the timing is out and it's rough, you get poor mileage. I think most operators that are operating their vehicles notice that where they used to get 6 litres to the 100 kilometres, now they're at 7 or 8, and their vehicle is running rough. They realize the economic advantage of going in and getting their vehicle tuned up and getting new spark plugs and getting it timed if it's needed.

How many times in our lives have we run into a new problem and looked back and said: if only I had 20/20 hindsight, I wouldn't have done that. Education is critical. I think we do a pretty good job here in the province of getting that out there, the importance of having a well-run vehicle. Again, our mechanics and those shops that we take our vehicles to, they are very good usually at telling people that, you know, you need to have your timing belt changed, you need new spark plugs, whatever it is.

The other dilemma – and this is the bigger area, I guess, I want to address – is that those people that are driving these are really in economic hardship, whether it's a single mother trying to take her child to a soccer game or some other thing, to have that mobility of moving them around, whether it's a senior who's on a fixed income and, again, not able to buy a newer vehicle. The numbers are really very small. I don't know. Perhaps the hon. member has some numbers that he could present to present his case on why we need to do this.

It has been mentioned about the amount of pollution that comes out of our vehicles, and it is a lot. It has an impact in our cities. I've been an advocate for a long time to burn propane and natural gas. I remember when the propane people came and visited me back in, I think, 2005-2006, and they were talking about the new technology and direct injection and those dilemmas.

Why do we want to target a group of people who are suffering economically, in all likelihood, with an old vehicle? If they had the economic means, there's absolutely no question that they would update and drive a new vehicle. They don't have that, so why would we want to target them and then have a bunch of allowances inside this bill that might say: oh, if you have economic hardships, then it's okay; you can continue on driving this. I have concerns about that.

We talk about incremental changes, and we often talk here in this House that, you know, well, it doesn't matter how much it costs if we can save one life. It does. It's where we deploy that money where maybe we can save a thousand asthma patients rather than just save one life by changing a small incremental law.

I think that if we're serious and we're wanting to really address the nitrous oxide, the VOCs, or the volatile organic compounds, those things, what we should be looking at is changing the taxes, changing the incentive to move to a cleaner fuel, a one-carbon fuel rather than a multicarbon fuel, because that reduces all of the pollutants that we really know cause the problems. So I would urge the member and all members in here to vote against this motion. It's not in the proper direction where we really can make some major steps forward.

If our environment is, in fact, what we're trying to approach here, we can look at running natural gas vehicles, liquefied natural gas.

There are many new options that are out there that give us great opportunity. Think of the change – we talk about the change – if we were to switch our coal generation to natural gas generation. We'd also have a huge, significant change if we were to become a nation – and we have an abundance of natural gas – that says: "You know what? We want natural gas powered vehicles here in the province." Set up a system. I remember ATCO in the '70s tried to make the push to do that. Again, the resistance kind of came back, and tax laws changed.

We can and we should enhance the idea of a better, cleaner fuel, but that better, cleaner fuel isn't a 5 per cent ethanol injection into our gas. It's actually using methane, the one-carbon fuel that really reduces all of the organic compounds, that reduces the nitric oxide. All of those problems that we really are concerned with, the smog, are doable by changing to a cleaner fuel.

5:40

I would urge all members to not vote for Motion 512. We can look at other ways to make major changes to the pollution going on in our major cities especially and not target a small group of individuals who, through economic conditions or perhaps educational ones, are still running these old vehicles. There are not that many on the road. This would be very cost prohibitive to many people. Even young individuals who are going off to university often drive an old vehicle because that's all they can afford to get around in. They might only fire it up once every two weeks, yet it's critical for them to be able to get around and to make it to the different functions or classes that they need to. Perhaps it's an evening class and they don't want to have to ride the bus when they've left the university late. There are many reasons why people drive these older vehicles. This motion is targeting those that drive them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I just don't feel, overall, if you weigh the pros to the cons on this, that there is a major benefit where we can say: "Oh, let's move forward. We can see a huge decrease in the amount of pollution. We can feel for those people with asthma that can't walk on the streets." Let's target it at a bigger picture, a greater impact on the pollution and the smog that we have in our cities. I hope that we'll consider looking at burning a one-carbon fuel rather than a multicarbon fuel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have a list here, so I'll just follow the list. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and speak to Motion 512. This motion does have significant importance to Alberta due to the fact that throughout the province private vehicles generate 7,073 kilotonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a study done by StatsCan in 2007. There's no doubt that the use of vehicles in Alberta has become a way of life, and they are essential for almost all of our residents so that they can perform the day-to-day tasks that require them and their families to be mobile.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 512 urges the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection maintenance, or IM, program. Under this proposed legislation vehicles would undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions. The IM program would allow for certain exemptions as well as include a repair cost limit. The wording of

this motion does not specifically lay out how an IM program would have to be implemented.

I believe it's important and would be beneficial to examine other jurisdictions to learn the specifics of their IM programs for comparison. Mr. Speaker, currently both B.C. and Ontario have functional IM programs in place to reduce smog-causing trucks, cars, and buses. For instance, Ontario's drive clean program states that a vehicle must have an emissions test in order for registration to be renewed beginning five years after its production. I know there are many similar programs in the U.S., especially California. In addition, if a vehicle requires an emissions test, a reminder would be sent to the owner as part of their vehicle licence renewal application from the ministry of transport, so there are no surprises or inconveniences. Similarly, an emissions test is also required for an ownership transfer for vehicles with a model year older than the current calendar year. This ensures the buyer's purchase of a passing vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's drive clean program has standards for both light duty vehicles such as passenger cars, vans, light trucks, and sport utility vehicles and a program for heavy-duty vehicles such as large trucks and buses. It's also important to note that vehicles of the 1997 and older model years are exempt from testing as well as all hybrid vehicles. Additionally, vehicles designated as historic, light duty commercial farm vehicles, kit cars, and motorcycles are also exempt.

Ontario's drive clean program takes into account that some owners of light duty vehicles cannot fully afford to repair or replace their vehicles to meet the emissions standards. That is why Ontario has included a repair cost limit, or RCL, in its policy framework. This allows vehicles not meeting emissions standards or which fail their retest to be issued a conditional pass report. In the incident that a person's vehicle receives a conditional pass report, they may renew their registration without having their vehicle fully repaired. Ontario's RCL places a maximum of \$450 on what a person must spend on emission-related repairs.

Just in reference to what the members for Airdrie-Chestermere and Calgary-Glenmore had said, there is a cost attached to driving a vehicle. No, not everyone can afford that cost, but in this country most people can. Speaking from experience as a General Motors dealer for a lot of my life, yes, there is a percentage of people that can't afford it, but there is also a percentage of people, Mr. Speaker, that simply choose not to do that maintenance. We've got to keep our vehicles safe, and we have to be responsible for our environment, so there's a line there.

British Columbia also has an IM program. There are similarities between the Ontario program and the B.C. one, but there are differences also. The IM program called AirCare was adopted only in the lower Fraser valley because of its dense population and increasing emissions concerns. The vehicles that are included in the AirCare program are all light-duty vehicles, 5,000 kilograms and under. As of 2009 some of the vehicles that are exempt from B.C.'s AirCare program include 2003 or newer model year vehicles, so seven years old, vehicles with vintage plates, motorcycles, snowmobiles, amphibious vehicles, ATVs, farm fleet and agriculture vehicles, and hybrid vehicles. Those vehicles that fail an AirCare tailpipe test have higher than normal emissions output than vehicles of the same age and type.

The RCL in B.C. are in place to ensure that motor vehicle emissions are lowered while also limiting the financial burden on vehicle owners. In the case that a vehicle is not worth repairing, the ministry recommends removing that vehicle from use. Mr. Speaker, the Ontario and B.C. IM programs are examples showing that there are many ways for IM programs to be implemented.

The Alberta government would have to clearly define which vehicles would be included in the inspection and maintenance program and which vehicles would be exempt. Furthermore, considerations need to be made with regard to RCL and when and how often it's necessary to be inspected and repaired.

I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this important matter, which has given us the opportunity to discuss it further. Again, I don't think it creates any unnecessary hardship for the vast majority of Albertans, and it is important that vehicles are maintained safely and that we do whatever we can reasonably do for a reasonable cost to protect our environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be brief. It's surprising the amount of e-mail and calls that we've received on this little motion, which in my time in the Legislature is somewhat unusual because a lot of times Albertans don't pay a lot of attention to the private bill process or motions. While I believe Motion 512 is well intended and it's aimed at cleaning up the environment, in my mind it singles out low-income Albertans, especially seniors. That's where I have a problem, actually, with this particular motion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to bring you to one of the constituents who has brought this to my attention. He's a sweet, sweet, old senior, and his name is Milo. He came to my office in his well-maintained, older car to share how the government affects him and how he felt about the motion. Milo, or Mr. F., as we like to call him, uses his well-maintained, old car to drive Mrs. F. to church. He also drives her to the doctor because her health isn't good. He also takes her to the grocery store. People like Milo and his wife both live on seniors' fixed income, and he's very, very concerned about what this motion is going to do to his older, well-maintained car.

The other interesting thing that I'm getting a lot of calls on – and I'm not sure if the member is aware of this – is from Albertans who feel they're being targeted. They collect classic, antique cars. They take their little collector car, their little antique car out on a Sunday drive, or they participate in classic car shows. We happen to have a condo in Radium, and it always seems to be the weekend that we're up in Radium when they have their big classic antique car show, and it brings people from all over. You have these proud people displaying their old, classic cars, and I have to admit that I love watching Barrett-Jackson, and I love seeing some of those old cars roll in to get auctioned off. Those are the type of people that feel that they're going to be penalized by this motion, so it would be interesting to hear what the mover has to say about that.

5:50

The majority of the cars on the roads are newer models, and the people that we've talked to with these older cars are well intentioned. They take very good care of their cars, and I refer to the seniors or the car collectors. I'm not a car person, Mr. Speaker. I drive a reliable car, a 2006 RAV4, and I have to have on the record that I love my RAV. It gets me back and forth to Edmonton on the Queen E II all the time very faithfully. It's a car that I really, really enjoy driving. One of the things that was brought to our attention on this particular motion is the brand new cars that they then spend thousands and thousands of dollars souping up and the emissions that they spew out as they're driving down the highway. Like I said, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a car person. I honestly can't tell one car from another other than a RAV because I'm a RAV driver, and I do know what a Mustang looks like because they're pretty hot cars.

While I appreciate what the member is trying to bring forward and I think it's admirable, just at this point in time my job is to represent the people in Calgary-Fish Creek. Actually, as Wildrose members we get a lot of correspondence every day from Albertans, and it's sometimes a little overwhelming just trying to keep up. They have indicated to us as a party that they do not want us to support this bill. As a caucus we believe in democracy, and we believe that our role is to represent Albertans and bring forward their views.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I will not be supporting this motion.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, do you wish to speak?

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in favour of Motion 512. I've been hearing comments pro and con. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was talking about Mustangs. Maybe she owned one in her younger days. Maybe that was a souped up car for her. My buddy had a Camaro, you know, and we used to have fun driving those old Mustangs and Camaros around, but I think I'm getting a little grey, too, so I stay away from those souped-up cars.

**Ms Blakeman:** Why?

**Mr. Kang:** I'm concerned about the environment now, Laurie. In our younger days we do foolish things.

This motion makes sense because time and again we hear that there's a small number of cars which don't meet – maybe, you know, they've got high emissions. This motion, if adopted, I don't think will affect very many people. When the vehicles change hands, there could be – you know, when we're buying a house, we put all kinds of conditions: the fence has to be fixed; the driveway has to be fixed. If you adopt this motion and somebody is buying a car, they could put the condition: have the car brought up to snuff, and only then we will buy it. It will not be too long before, you know, all cars will be meeting the standards.

We've got to pay the price to keep our environment clean. We want to breathe clean air. Poorly maintained vehicles can boost fuel consumption up 15 per cent, and that will significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions. As Environment Canada says, the benefits of better fuel economy will exceed costs by 3 to 1. Twenty-seven per cent of countries' greenhouse gas emissions are produced by cars and trucks and trains and ships. That's a high number, Mr. Speaker. The feds have implemented high-efficiency standards, and the industry expects they will be required to make an average improvement of 20 per cent, likely, by 2017.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but Standing Order 8(3) provides five minutes for the sponsor of the motion to close debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of Motion 512 is clear: to improve the air quality of Alberta for present and future generations. The motion wording is broad and general, allowing a variety of ways for this goal to be achieved. In this way the government would have the opportunity to develop a made-in-Alberta vehicle inspection maintenance program. For debate purposes one option is to require vehicles older than 10 years to undergo an inspection before the title is transferred.

To answer some of the questions from Airdrie-Chestermere and Calgary-Glenmore, it's not the idea of this motion to test vehicles every year or, as in B.C., every second year. That's not the idea. It's also not the idea for antique vehicles. There would be exemptions for those vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, I know that protecting the environment is one of this government's priorities. Therefore, I look forward to Alberta's future as I know this government will continue to protect Alberta's water, land, and air. Regardless of whether this motion passes here today in the Assembly, I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding Motion 512 and believe it was an important discussion to

have in this Assembly. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Assembly who participated in this motion debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 512 carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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