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The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 7, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will proceed now to the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

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.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a bright, enthusiastic group of 50 grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Of the 50 students, 21 are in the French immersion program. Accompanying the students are their exceptional teachers Natalie Gago-Estevés, Matthew Thiessen, M. Luc Drapeau along with student teacher Jacqueline Winters. I'd like to extend a special welcome to M. Drapeau as this is his first visit to the Legislative Assembly. Bienvenue à l'Assemblée législative. When speaking with these students, they raised some very thought-provoking questions. They are among the best students that we've had in this Assembly this season. I would hope that all members of this House would give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing two groups. The first has travelled from Wyoming, including Rosie Berger as Wyoming state Representative; Cheryl Duvauchelle, director of finance and development and director of the annual meeting; and Carrie Hoffman, administrative and logistics associate. These members are representing the Council of State Governments – West officials, representing 13 states. They plan to hold their meeting here in 2012. I would ask if they would please rise with David Kettles, our staff member, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Note that they're all three wonderful women.

Mr. Speaker, my other guests are students that I had the privilege of visiting with in their school and engaging in a lot of

dialogue about politics and how the Legislature works: 52 students accompanied by Kerri Blush, Chris Sudyk, Val Diakun, Mona Sawatzky, and Larissa Sulyma. The Woodbridge Farms elementary school is a proud group that has much in the way of knowledge but huge questions that I think we all would enjoy if we had the time to spend with them today. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a real treat for me today to introduce to the Assembly and to you a school from my constituency named Belgravia elementary school. Now, Belgravia has a strong historical linkage to this Assembly. Even though it's a very small school, at least three graduates from Belgravia have served as members of this Assembly, including the former Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Debby Carlson, the current Member for Edmonton-Centre, and myself.

An Hon. Member: It's a training academy.

Dr. Taft: Yes, it is a training academy for this Assembly. I think it speaks well to the commitment and brightness of the students here.

We have a large group of grades 5 and 6 accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Devine and Miss Gusniowsky, otherwise known as Miss G. They are accompanied by parent helpers Ms Maskell, Ms Cameron, Dr. Wong, Ms Odishaw, and Mrs. Bronson. I will be speaking with them later in the week, but for now I'd ask them all, please, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a great Albertan, a dear friend of mine, and a former MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Mr. Denis Ducharme. It's a great pleasure always to see him here, and I'd like to welcome him to the Legislature. I'd like everyone to give him a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a long-time friend of mine – his name is Blake Robert – who resides in Edmonton-Glenora with his wife, Sara. Blake is a former PC Youth president and someone I've known at least 10 years. He's sitting in the public gallery. I would like to ask him to please rise and have the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees Women's Committee. AUPE represents over 76,000 workers, who are an essential part of this economy. Today they are here to express that child care is an essential need for the working families that they represent, that the AUPE Women's Committee is devoted to bringing this concern of their members to the forefront, and to remind this government that all working Albertans and our children deserve this service. I would now like to ask my guests to rise as I call their names: Sandra Azocar, Cara Rotenburger, Ramona Price, Amanda McMurren, Margaret Gregory, Marjorie Christie, Clarke

McChesney, Mary Kehoe, and Bren-Lee Thidrickson. I ask that all members of the Assembly join me in providing them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you some special guests who are sitting in the public gallery this afternoon. Donna Hunter and Marjorie Kirsop were present last week when I asked the minister about secular education in Morinville. They have made the trip here again today and will welcome the opportunity to speak with the minister about their concerns. I'd like to ask my guests to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always an honour to rise and introduce individuals to you and through you to all of the Assembly. I'd ask that Patricia Kobewka rise. She's a new staff member with the Wildrose, and we appreciate her dedication and her excitement that she brings to the office and the work that she does.

Members' Statements

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

Federal Public Building Renovations

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I come from a long line of people who wear blue collars. I am the first member in my family to hold elected office. I take this very seriously, and I take the livelihoods of my constituents seriously. I am a fiscal conservative, but first and foremost I am a tradesman. So when a member in this Assembly waxed poetic about how the citizens of the province would be better off if we stopped work on the federal building project, I have to question the motives of the hon. member. I can only assume the member has no experience with trades or employees.

1:40

Construction works like this. In tough times your first priority is to keep your people busy, but I would not expect the hon. member to know this because, to my knowledge, he has never worried about making payroll or sweated about how to keep the crew busy. You don't have to be a very big contractor to have a thousand people – employees, spouses, children, subtrades and their families – depending upon your ability to bid work and secure jobs.

No contractor can afford to lose his best people; margins get cut long before staff. It's how the business operates. We call it working to keep the lights on. For a member to want to stop a job site without the slightest understanding of what such a ridiculous statement means shows ignorance and contempt for those who wear the blue collar. There is as much dignity and honour in turning a drawing into a building as there is in preparing a legal brief.

The blue collar, my collar, work very hard to make this province the best it can be. We are the world experts at winter construction and the most productive in adverse conditions. We do good work and are proud of it. To suggest that people are not working on the federal building is a slap in the face to every man and woman on that job site and every tradesperson in this province. Your ignorance is surpassed only by your arrogance. You

could apologize, hon. member, but I frankly doubt if anyone would care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Health Care System

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ever since the Premier took over leadership of the province back in 2006, public health care has suffered a degree of mismanagement so severe that two-thirds of Albertans even now believe the system is in crisis. Like Alberta Liberals, Albertans recognize that it is indeed Tory mismanagement, not lack of funding, that has brought us to this point.

It all began with the failed experiment of disbanding the health regions, an announcement made suddenly after the 2008 election, a huge fundamental change to health care delivery that should have been raised during the campaign. This government had no mandate to make such massive changes, changes that went over budget by \$1.2 billion, money that could have been and should have been used for improvements on the front lines of health care. Instead, it was wasted on an administrative catastrophe completely contrary to the government's goals of improving efficiency.

Since the creation of Alberta Health Services to the end of fiscal 2011-12 \$36 billion will have flowed into health care without proper accounting, leaving us with no way to tell how much of the taxpayer money was used wisely and how much was wasted. While the Premier and his ministers continue to promise improvement, senior health officials have said on the record that, for example, emergency wait times cannot be met.

In 2008 concerned physicians revealed over 300 cases of compromised care at Edmonton emergency rooms in just a few weeks, but this government won't offer whistle-blower protection for health care professionals, nor will they launch a truly independent investigation. Even more serious allegations have been raised, allegations that deserve an independent public inquiry so that Albertans can get the facts. Doctors and nurses want to speak out, but they live in fear of their own government. In order for Albertans to have confidence in any inquiry, all witnesses must be protected, with immunity for testimony guaranteed.

This Tory government has proven time and again they cannot manage public health care, Albertans' most important public institution. There is a better way, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Access to Child Care

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an outstanding achievement. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services established the creating child care choices plan in 2008. This plan was designed to greatly improve parents' access to quality child care in our province. This plan provided communities across Alberta with a wide range of incentives designed to offset the cost of opening new child care spaces, increase the number of qualified child care staff, and ultimately make access to quality child care more affordable for lower income parents.

Our government's goal was to create 14,000 new child care spaces in this province. Recently we surpassed the 18,000 mark. I feel that this is an incredible achievement, Mr. Speaker. Now that the goal has been exceeded, our government's focus will shift to sustaining the more than 90,000 quality child care spaces that exist across the province. We are already under way with this plan. In

fact, in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods I was able to present a cheque for \$95,500 on behalf of our government this past November, ensuring the sustainability of current child care spaces as well as helping to create new ones in the community. This funding helped offset the cost of opening 103 new spaces in the community.

I would like to thank again the Minister of Children and Youth Services for establishing and creating the child care choices plan in 2008. I commend this very important program and have seen first-hand the benefits it has produced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Juvenile Curling Provincial Championships

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate all the teams which curled in the Optimist International Alberta juvenile curling provincial championship held at the Granite curling club in Coaldale this past weekend. The six top qualifying Alberta juvenile curling teams in both the men's division and the women's division played off for the opportunity to represent Alberta at the Canadian juvenile championships in Ontario later this month. The teams that participated are from throughout our province, including Grande Prairie, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Peace River, Calgary, and Airdrie.

The women's winning team was the Rocque team of Fort Saskatchewan. Second place went to the Brown team of Airdrie. The men's winning team was the Vavrek team of Dawson Creek, B.C., and the Harty team, that came in second, came from Nanton.

As all members certainly know, Alberta has been a dominant force in both the Canadian and the world curling scenes for many years now. After watching the games this weekend, our province looks to be well placed to enjoy this dominance for years to come.

In addition to the participants, I would also like to congratulate the Coaldale Granite curling club and all of the volunteers for doing such an excellent job of hosting this event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Foster Parents

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a very important service in our world. We talk about standing on guard for thee, standing on guard for our country. I would profess that we don't do that quite enough, and I would also profess that I think there are many ways of standing on guard for one's country, many ways that aren't out in the public eye. One of those ways is by being a foster parent. That's where you step up and take responsibility for children in times of absolute crisis.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008 I started a bit of an effort to recruit foster parents from various different ethnic and religious backgrounds so that children in a very difficult situation could be made that much more comfortable going to a foster family that perhaps understands their culture, language, and heritage a little bit better.

I'm incredibly proud today to rise and say that one family that I've been working with has now been foster parents for about six months, and they're incredibly proud of becoming foster parents. Rupinder and Sukhjit Sran are the first foster parents of East Indian heritage in the city of Calgary, and they love it. I've had the opportunity to meet with them on several occasions, and they as parents, as members of the community are more fulfilled now by being foster parents than ever before.

Mr. Speaker, I once again ask people to consider being foster parents, especially those from various different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

South Health Campus Operational Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The south Calgary health campus is a year away from completion, and Tory mismanagement is again jeopardizing patient care. Last week the minister of health claimed to fully staff new hospitals, but the Alberta Health Services' chairman says that the current five-year funding proposed by the Tory government is not sufficient to cover the costs of operation. To the Premier: are we to believe your minister of health or Alberta Health Services' chairman?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: My minister of health.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the now defunct Calgary health region had to threaten to borrow or issue bonds to get the facility built. What other political games will Alberta Health Services have to play to get properly funded for operational budgets as well as building?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll allow the hon. member to clarify what he said, because I'll challenge him on that remark.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier doesn't have much confidence in the Health Services Board chairman.

How can Albertans rely on the Tory government to sufficiently budget operational costs when this Tory negligence tripled the original construction budget to a whopping \$1.3 billion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget was not tripled. The budget kept pace with the requests coming from Calgarians in terms of what they wanted to see in the south Calgary health campus. There were more services added, teaching capabilities, to the health campus. Quite frankly, it is one of the largest hospitals being built if not in western Canada, indeed, in all of Canada.

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

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this government continues to ignore the needs of 2 out of 3 Albertans who believe the health care system is in crisis. Last week the minister of health chose to further erode public confidence in health care by not calling for an independent investigation into compromised care for 322 patients. This government has no credibility in investigating itself, and it's Albertans who are suffering. To the Premier: will the Premier direct the minister to call for an independent investigation of these 322 cases where Albertans received compromised ER care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned last week in this House and then the hon. minister again read out very clearly the policies of Alberta Health Services. If there is any employee of Alberta

Health Services that has any evidence of any compromise of any health services in this province, it is the duty of the employee to make that public.

Dr. Swann: At risk to their future, of course, Mr. Speaker. I have some personal experience with that.

To the Premier again: will the government finally do the right thing and allow the Health Quality Council to launch its own independent investigation free from political interference?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I'm sure that the person who raised those allegations will question the leader today, and I will be able to respond to those so-called allegations that were made publicly, by protection of immunity in this House.

Dr. Swann: Three years of allegations, Mr. Premier, from emergency doctors across the province. Total neglect. How can Albertans trust a government who for over three years ignored these 322 Albertans, all within a few weeks in an Edmonton emergency room, and their care? How can you justify that?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this province has one of the best health systems in Canada. We have invested a lot of money. In fact, this morning I attended the opening of the Villa Caritas, a 42 per cent increase in beds for the mentally ill. If I remember correctly, this opposition opposed the construction of those additional beds for mentally ill seniors in the province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. [interjections] Okay. I'm quite prepared to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but if you want me to wait, I'll wait.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

South Health Campus Operational Funding (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just heard as an Assembly the Premier essentially throw the chairman of Alberta Health Services under the bus in a dispute or difference with the minister of health. This is on an issue in which the funding of the largest hospital being built, potentially, in Canada is at stake. My question is to the Premier. Given that he does not have confidence in the position of Mr. Hughes in saying that the budget will not cover operating costs of the south Calgary hospital, will he ask Mr. Hughes to resign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing I don't have confidence in is the kind of quotes that they bring to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, the quotes will be in *Hansard* for the Premier to review.

My next question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister please explain what the funding plan is for the operation of the south Calgary hospital?

Mr. Zwozdesky: A good question, a rare one but a good one. I want to clarify right now that the chair and I had this discussion, and we're both on the same page in terms of the funding. There's \$84 million or thereabouts in the forthcoming budget, which I would encourage this member and others to vote for when the budget comes up for discussion. That will assist in the recruitment and training of the people needed to staff that hospital. There's an enormous amount of new capacity coming on stream, and we will be there to fund it now and in the years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's barely a start on the issue. Eighty-four million dollars is not going to operate the largest hospital in Alberta and western Canada. So tell me, Mr. Minister, what will be the operating budget on an annual basis for the south Calgary hospital?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it'll be ramped up. Perhaps he didn't hear what I said: \$84 million in this coming year's budget, which I hope he will vote for, which starts April 1. That will be for the recruitment piece and for the training piece. There's some off-site virtual training that has to occur. Next year when we bring in the budget for that year, you'll see probably \$150 million – I'm ballparking it – for the first year as we ramp up 233 beds that will open there, thousands of other staff. I'll get you the exact figure. The important thing, hon. member, is that in the year where those monies for operating are needed, they will be there in that budget, and you'll have a chance to debate it.

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

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a Health Quality Council in the province for a reason. Part of its mandate is to assess, inquire into, or study matters respecting patient safety and the quality of patient care that are referred to it at the request of Alberta Health Services. We have 322 documented cases of emergency room delays, with painful and sometimes fatal results, and that's only one emergency room. Given that the Health Quality Council can't investigate until directed to do so, why hasn't the health minister given such orders so that we can get to the bottom of it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think I quite got exactly what the question was all about – it was all around everywhere – but I'll read it later, hon. member, if you don't mind, and I'll try and respond to it. [interjections] It's just that there were some distractions from the other side, just like there are now.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask this question very slowly. The 322 emergency room delays that caused some very painful hardships for Albertans: will you call the health council and let them investigate so that we can get to the bottom of it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: That's a decent question. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this issue is relatively old news. It's already been addressed. We have some people who have looked into this, and as a result of that, in fact, I did a press conference today. So we are reducing the wait times for emergency in-patients by as much as 70 per cent in some hospitals in Calgary and in Edmonton by as low as 42 per cent. Improvements have been made to address exactly what the emergency docs asked us to do last October, and the protocols are working.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, those emergency doctors have been asking for two years.

Let me ask you this very simply, Mr. Minister: will you call in the Health Quality Council to investigate the 322 cases that were documented previously?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, should that become necessary, I will take the appropriate steps. At this stage what became necessary was to address the issues that the doctors wanted addressed.

They wanted more beds; we just added 360. They wanted more continuing care spaces; we just added almost 1,300, and we'll be adding another 4,000. They wanted new discharge protocols; we've got that in place. They wanted patient navigators. They wanted other improvements. All of these things taken together with home care and so on are making a huge difference, and people are getting in and out a lot faster than ever before.

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

NHL Arena Funding

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NHL franchises are making millions in profits but asking the public to pay for new arenas. Many successful Canadian arenas have been entirely privately funded. Will the Minister of Infrastructure commit to making sure that not one dime of provincial funds goes towards new arenas for NHL franchises in Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. As you are well aware and as the member of the fourth party, I guess it is, knows, there is ongoing discussion between the city of Edmonton and the group that is hoping to have a hockey team in Edmonton. Those discussions are continuing to happen.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister completely dodged the question, I'm going to have to phrase it again. Will he assure the House today that not one dime of provincial government funds goes towards privately owned NHL arenas in this province?

Mr. Danyluk: No.

Mr. Mason: So that's no assurance. So you're saying yes. Okay, Mr. Speaker.

Given that I asked for an assurance that public funds would not go towards NHL arenas and the minister said no, I'm assuming that he said that he's not going to give that assurance. So does he agree that the citizens do not give their hard-earned taxpayer dollars in order to privately fund profitable corporations of whatever kind? Yes or no?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I find it a little bit ironic that I have to interpret the question or at least explain the question that the member of the fourth party is relaying. I want to make this very clear. No, the Alberta government is not going to directly support the arena.

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

Delays in Medical Care

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness say: show us the proof. Investigations cost money, but this government has received ample evidence over the past four years, which the Clerk will table later on. Today credibility is on the line. In front of the Premier there is proof of his written word and e-mails to his past health ministers with pleas for help from the front lines of health care and hundreds of cases where Albertans have suffered due to delays in care. To the Premier: where is the public investigation into these

hundreds of cases and the proof that you took immediate action to address these concerns?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member delivered a letter to the office earlier today and in that letter said: "Would you please stay here for the sixth question? And I'm also with this letter tabling these documents." Well, I just got these documents, and the first letter here is a letter from February 23, '08, to a Dr. Peter Kwan that was issued by me, and that was during the campaign. I have looked through these documents. There's a list of e-mails, quite a number of e-mails.

The Speaker: Okay. That's fine. Thank you. No documents have been tabled in this House yet. Documents may be hand delivered to some member, but the rest of the members have no idea what documents are being referred to. Proceed to your second question.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that proof is the issue of the day, what were you thinking? What were you thinking when you brought in the hon. Member for Calgary-West, who immediately reversed all the previous minister's decisions and implemented the code of conduct to silence front-line staff when, in fact, you already had solid evidence to call for a public investigation? Premier, what were you thinking?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, these allegations have been made in the House under protection, of course, by immunity. None of these allegations were made outside the House. I'm going to ask that hon. member to in particular provide the proof and the supporting documents of the 250 people that died on the wait list for cancer surgery as that's what he said in the House and that Ministers Mar and the hon. Member for Sherwood Park were aware of this along with Dr. Trevor Theman and Sheila Weatherill. "Physicians who raised these issues were either punished or driven out of the province or paid out in millions to buy their silence and the costs buried in the books under the former . . ."

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't realize that I had to answer questions.

To the Premier: the ER doctors are sitting up above and awaiting your answers. Before you leave public office, will you guarantee to them in writing and in legislation that patient confidentiality will be respected, that they will have full protection for the front-line staff so that this Legislature can restore Albertans' confidence by ordering . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that any ER docs here in the audience, if there are, and anybody that's working for Alberta Health Services are fully aware of the policy that Alberta Health Services has. Please, let's not hide behind the fact that: oh, I don't want my name out there. Anybody working for the organization has a duty to report, and that reporting, of course, has the supporting documentation that comes directly to the minister so he can assess all of these allegations that have been made time and time again in the House but never outside this House.

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

Health Services Financial Reporting

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to spend billions of dollars without adequate financial

control. I have sent over in advance all the background information to the minister of health for the questions I would like to ask him now. To the minister of health: are you confident that the amount of \$308 million in one-time funding that was granted to Alberta Health Services on page 17 of the 2008-09 annual report is accurate?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can only assume it's accurate because these numbers are audited by the Auditor General, and before he signs off on them, I think that he does his due diligence. So I'm going to presume on that basis that the Auditor General's audit of those numbers would be accurate.

Mr. MacDonald: The numbers on page 17, Mr. Speaker, in my view, are not audited. However, on page 126 of the same report they are audited, and it lists \$377 million in one-time financial assistance to Alberta Health Services while, again, you indicate \$308 million in one-time funding. Why is there a difference of \$69 million, and where did it go?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's an undertone there that is a bit nasty sounding. He did send me some documents. I'll have a look through them. There are four or five pages here. I didn't have a chance to read them through – I was busy answering other questions – but I'll have a look and see if the hon. member is onto something here or if he's just blowing some wild smoke, and we'll find out.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I can't help it if the minister of health is uncomfortable about his own financial statements.

Again to the same minister: why does the business plan for 2010 list for the year in question one-time operating funding for Alberta Health Services as \$297 million? You have one report. You have two sets of numbers. Why, sir? That's not a nasty question.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this member is so completely out of touch here. Do you not understand one-time funding, hon. member? For heaven's sakes, there's a lot of one-time funding. Sometimes it's for recruitments; it's a one-time initiative. Sometimes it's for training; it's a one-time initiative. Sometimes it's for deficit elimination. Sometimes it's just to keep up with the excellent services that we provide. There are a lot reasons why you could have one-time funding of this amount and one-time funding of that amount because there will be different reasons why it's used. That's the whole point: one time.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Detail

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to repeat this again. Twice last week I indicated one should look at *Beauchesne* to see the nature of question period and what have you. Some members obviously didn't have time this past weekend, but that last series of questions – no disrespect, hon. member – would probably best be served in Public Accounts Committee, which meets once a week. It's rather specific.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Federal Public Building Renovations

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, \$115 million is being invested in this year's budget for projects on the Legislature Grounds, the redevelopment of the federal building, the Centennial Plaza, and the parkade. My questions are for the Minister of

Infrastructure. Are you considering stopping or delaying any of these particular projects?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, no. There are no plans to abandon the project. The project is well under way, and the plans are to finish it in 2012. We started this project in different economic times, but continuing the project, I think, is very prudent. The construction costs are lower now than first estimated. At first it was for \$356 million, and now the project costs \$275 million.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: what would be the impact of abandoning any of these particular projects midstream as some have suggested?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about employees, there are 550 employees that are moving from three other buildings, two major upgrades and one leased, staff from Finance and Enterprise and the Treasury Board and Legislative Assembly staff and, yes, some MLAs. It's the right thing to do. It's the right location, it's the best use of an existing building, and it is the right time to build.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question for the same minister: given that there's still misunderstanding about the federal building, can the minister explain why the offices and the office space are needed in the federal building?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I mean, the offices are very important. As mentioned before, we need them for the staff that we do have. The importance of the building, of course, is in having the space for those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, going back, I just want to say that it is definitely the wrong message to give to industry in the province of Alberta when we talk about needing confidence and stability in the workplace.

Secular Public Education in Greater St. Albert

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, parents in Morinville have no choice but to send their children to schools permeated by religious theology. That's because in Morinville the Catholic board is a public school board. When I asked the Minister of Education if this situation is acceptable, he simply replied: no. To the Minister of Education: how can the minister acknowledge that the situation in Morinville is unacceptable, then choose to do nothing about it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that I was going to do nothing about it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why don't we follow up on that? What are you going to do about it, then, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the school board in question to do its job, and I'm going to meet with them to encourage them to do their job.

Mr. Hehr: So by that answer will the Morinville people have a public school to send their children to very shortly?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Greater St. Albert Catholic school board is a public board. It has an obligation to provide

public education to the students that are entrusted to its jurisdiction, and it is incumbent upon that board to meet with the parents to determine what the appropriate way to provide that type of education to those children is. If I perceive that there's a difficulty with them doing that, I will be meeting with the board to encourage them in that regard.

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

South Health Campus

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The south health campus in Calgary-Hays is quickly becoming a considerable landmark on the south side of Calgary. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us what impact the opening will have in creating what we need most in our health system, improved access?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary south health campus is the single largest project on the capital plan books right now. The short answer is that there will be a tremendous increase in capacity. In short, there will be room for 40,000 more patients to come through the emergency department alone. There will be capacity for over 200,000 visits for outpatients. There will be approximately 2,600 staff.

While I'm up, I'll just clarify. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked how much the funding would be. I said approximately \$150 million. In fact, it's incremental funding of about \$143 million next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and third questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister assure my constituents that this project is going ahead on schedule?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are going ahead on schedule. It is in our budget, and it's the top priority, and it's on track to be phased open, if I can say, in 2012. Presently on that site we have 1,500 tradespeople working: 500 mechanical tradespeople, 500 electrical tradespeople, carpenters, painters, landscapers. This project is important for the people of Calgary.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question for the same minister: can you explain how this hospital will benefit my constituents in the city of Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is going to reduce the times for south Calgary residents to travel. This hospital is also built for the future for thousands of people who live and move into the south-east Calgary neighbourhoods. It's also for nearby residents of Okotoks, Langdon, and High River. But, most importantly, the hospital will be a shining example of the Premier's vision for the most advanced infrastructure in North America.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government clings to the short-sighted P3 infrastructure model, off-loading future funding obligations to the next generation. Last week the Minister of

Transportation was bragging about the cost savings of the P3 contract model; however, he didn't have any idea of the amount saved. To the Minister of Transportation: how can this minister know that there are any cost savings without actually knowing the cost?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, needless to say, this hon. member has never ever listened to what the P3 model is all about. When we go out and do a P3 model, we have to do a public market comparator, and we do that market comparator on what it would be like to deliver the project conventionally. We put that market comparator into an envelope, it gets sent to the Justice minister, and it gets opened at the same time that the other bids are opened, to make sure that the public-private partnership is a cost savings . . .

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

Mr. Kang: Give me the envelope, please, so we know the savings.

To the minister again: how can there be any accountability in this year's infrastructure when you are off-loading the costs to future generations? How can there be any accountability there?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the P3 model that we are doing in southeast Calgary right now showed a billion dollar savings from conventional delivery in that market comparator, and that's public knowledge. He could have gone and looked at all of the contracts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, will you make the contents of that envelope public after the fact? Make them public.

To the minister again: given that the P3s have a decades-long maintenance commitment, what happens if a company with P3 obligations goes bankrupt?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there's a bonding company in place.

But I want to let this hon. member know, Mr. Speaker, that we do make the market comparator public. We've done it on all of the other ones.

An Hon. Member: It's like Ray's secret list. The P3 tunnel.

Mr. Ouellette: Everybody is talking about tunnels and everything else now, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to keep on track with this hon. member because he bounces around.

The Speaker: Well, hon. minister, what you do is look at me and speak to me, and I'll listen.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Abandoned Wells

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issues surrounding an abandoned well in the town of Calmar have highlighted a need for changes to regulations to ensure that development accommodates abandoned wells. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister outline what steps his department is taking to ensure that a similar situation does not arise elsewhere?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta takes this matter extremely seriously, and Municipal Af-

fairs is working with the ERCB to address the Calmar situation, the broader issue of abandoned wells and the development around abandoned wells. In my department we're proposing to amend the subdivision and development regulations to ensure that developers and municipalities identify and accommodate abandoned wells during their development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you give this Assembly a time frame in which the amendment will be enacted? Who have you consulted with, and in particular have you consulted with the residents of Calmar?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a need to ensure that the location of abandoned wells is identified at the time of development. It's equally important that setbacks from wells are maintained, and we are using what happened in Calmar to look at that. We want to make sure that should it be necessary to do additional work on wells, the proper setbacks are there. We are going through the government process to enact those proposed changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: what else is your department doing to address the Calmar situation, in particular for the homeowners affected in this subdivision?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I understand that Imperial Oil plans to remove five of the homes in this particular summer coming up, in 2011. The company has presently purchased four of those five homes. Municipal Affairs will continue to and has been providing assistance to mediate negotiations between Imperial Oil and the homeowners to allow the purchase of their properties. Hopefully, the parties involved will have an agreement in place in the not-too-distant future to purchase that remaining home.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Energy surprised many when he said he was aware of only one planned natural gas power plant, referring to TransAlta's Sundance project in central Alberta. This statement was bizarre coming from the Energy minister because there are, in fact, two additional natural gas power plants being built right now in and near Calgary that will bring almost 1,100 megawatts of new clean energy online to meet Calgary's needs. To the minister: how did he not know about these projects, when they are so relevant to the debate surrounding the need for billions of new transmission lines between central Alberta and Calgary? How did you miss that?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I assume that what the member is referring to is the Shepard plant, that is being proposed by Enmax, and the Bonnybrook plant, that is also being proposed by Enmax. What I said was that I was only aware of one that was actually ready for construction.

Mr. Anderson: There are two that are ahead of Sundance in order. Anyway, he can look that up later.

Given that 560 megawatts of power has been permanently shut down at TransAlta's central Alberta Sundance facility, yet the

lights remain on in Calgary, and given that almost 1,000 megawatts of new power is being built in Calgary to help meet the city's 1,600 megawatts of peak demand, will this minister agree that the AESO assessment for billions of new transmission between central Alberta and Calgary is outdated and that the need for it should be objectively reviewed by the AUC instead of rubber-stamped with Bill 50 and divvied out to PC friends without competitive bidding?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's just be clear. What happened with both the Bonnybrook and the Shepard plants was that there was the necessary review, that was undertaken by an independent assessment, to make sure that because it's a Crown corporation, there were no special advantages to Enmax. That work has been done. I have signed off on the document that says they are able to build. There is nothing in the ground, so for this member to say that the lights are still on in Calgary today: well, duh, they are. We're talking about 30 years down the road.

Mr. Anderson: It's frightful the amount of ignorance on that front bench on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, with billions of dollars in new transmission lines that look more and more unnecessary with each passing day and with those billions in building contracts being handed out to friends of the PC Party without a competitive bidding process, does this minister not understand why so many Albertans, who have to pay for this on their power bills, are furious with this boondoggle and view it as Alberta's version of the federal sponsorship scandal? Have you figured out how awful this looks, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that, as I've said several times in this House, there is an entity called the Alberta Electric System Operator, which is an independent group of professionals that looks at the long-term needs of the province. The long-term needs are that the current transmission system in this province is inadequate to move power from where it's produced to where it's required. That's exactly the essence behind Bill 50.

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

Logging in the Castle Special Management Area

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After listening to the minister's responses to Wednesday's Castle concerns, Albertans would be justified in thinking that the S of SRD stood for snake oil. The minister suggested that it was sustainable to cumulatively level one-third of the Castle as long as only 1 per cent per year is clear-cut and that there wouldn't be any perceptible long-term damage with two trees replanted for every one ripped out. I'll try the Minister of Environment. How long does it take for a lodgepole pine to reach maturity, and what are you advising locally affected landowners, businesses, and recreational enthusiasts to do while they wait?

The Speaker: If that's government policy, proceed.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Environment I'm acting on behalf of the Minister of SRD today, and in that capacity I'm prepared to certainly take that question on advisement. I don't have the technical background to answer that kind of a question. If the member would like to ask questions with respect to what I have some background in, I'd answer those. Otherwise, I'll have to defer to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hopefully, somebody has the answer, Mr. Speaker. Crossministerial initiatives would link Environment and SRD. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen in this province.

What are the survival rates of the two-for-one monoculture reforested pine tree beetle fodder, particularly on slopes where the ground cover has been so ripped up by heavy machinery as to be unable to retain either water or soil nutrients? That's an environmental question.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that is an operational question that has to do with forestry, for which I am not responsible. But I can only assume, in answer to the member's question, that the reason it's a two for one is because the survival rate is about 50 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Does the Environment minister maintain that clear-cutting is an environmentally sustainable practice compared to the preferred processes of selective logging and controlled burns practised by his federal and European counterparts, which are more in line with natural environmental processes?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that clear-cutting does not take place in Alberta any longer. We're talking about limits on the size of areas that can be harvested at any one particular time. We're talking about a 100-year rotation. So for this member to suggest that we have massive, you know, denuding of forests in Alberta is absolutely wrong. We've had forestry going on in this province for a hundred years, and there are a lot of Albertans that are very proud of the job that we do to protect our forests.

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

School Board Funding

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through the School Act the government of Alberta delegates much of its authority for the governance of education to locally elected school boards. Schools boards rely on funding from the government of Alberta to operate. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Can your ministry provide adequate, sustainable, and predictable long-term educational funding in order for the school boards to properly plan years ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this government does. We went to three-year business plans a long time ago. The reason for three-year business plans is to provide for the voted sums in the first year and for predictability and ability to plan for the out-years.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister: if a school board were to consider borrowing money to achieve its goal, would the ministry support this?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different aspects to that question. Obviously, it's not appropriate to borrow money to pay operating costs. This government doesn't do that, and no public body should do it. We should be able to pay our operating costs: today's groceries with today's dollars.

With respect to borrowing for buildings, school boards can borrow for buildings, with approval, if they're nonschool buildings. They can borrow for buildings, with approval, if they can show that the energy savings will pay for the cost of borrowing. At this point they cannot borrow for buildings unless there's a long-term way to show that that borrowing could be paid for.

Mr. Benito: My second supplemental is to the same minister. Would some change in taxation levels be an acceptable way to achieve this long-term school board funding?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, currently we do fund school boards in an equitable fashion across the province. It was quite a number of years ago that we went to a common provincial levy for educational property tax to ensure that it didn't depend on who had the largest industry where the dollars for education went but, rather, that every student across the province had equitable access to an educational program. That funding model is working and is working well.

Municipalities have on an ongoing, constant basis told us that they do not want us raising the educational property tax or putting school boards back into the property tax business. But we do have to look at other ways to help fund over the long term.

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

Environment Department Budget

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister protested last week that I was being unfair when I questioned his ministry's budget priorities. But since 2007, when this administration took over, the Environment budget has plummeted 30 per cent while the communications portion of the Environment budget is up 60 per cent. Now, that sure looks to me like propaganda is more important than action in this ministry. To the minister: if it's not about propaganda, then why has the action part of the budget dropped and the communications part increased over the last four years?

2:30

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to three hours of intense debate on my budget in this very Chamber on, I think, the 22nd of March. These kinds of in-depth questions I think are much more appropriately dealt with at that time. [interjection]

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Question period is no time to ask something of the minister.

Well, let me try again. Here's another example. The industry monitoring system RAMP is discredited in study after scientific study, and this ministry only put \$17 million into its monitoring system, so why does the government continue to pour money into communications rather than actually getting the work done, specifically providing the monitoring that both industry and the public require to know that all is well?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this member knows the answer to that question because she asked the same question during estimates last year, at which time I explained to her that the reason for the change in the communications budget is because we amalgamated the ministerial correspondence unit with the communications unit. There was no increase in overall spending. I told her last year in estimates, and I'll tell her again today.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Given that this government has relied on federal dollars to justify not taking action

itself on climate change, how will this ministry make up for an estimated 95 per cent decrease in climate change funding over the next two years?

Mr. Renner: One of the things I think is interesting to note that often gets overlooked is that we are the first jurisdiction in all of Canada that has brought in legislation that has a requirement that large industrial emitters contribute to a technology fund. Mr. Speaker, that fund thus far has allocated about a hundred million dollars. No other province has done that. Oh, and by the way, the chairman of that fund, Mr. Eric Newell, in making the announcement last week, pointed out that there's a multiplier effect on that fund, and that \$100 million has resulted in direct investment of in excess of \$450 million in this province. It's not in my budget.

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

Apprenticeship Supervision Ratio

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently the journeyperson to apprentice supervision ratio for 37 of 50 designated trades in Alberta was doubled from 1 to 1 to 1 to 2. Having worked in the trades and taught trades for a number of years, while that may seem like a relatively small change, when you double the number of people that can be supervised, some concerns may arise. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What was the motive for changing this very important ratio, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important proactive change that the government of Alberta has made to ensure that we will be ready for the future. We're being told that there will be a shortage of tradesmen in the province of Alberta. To understand it, training of a tradesperson, an apprentice, requires three things. It requires an employer, it requires a journeyman that can help provide on-the-job training, and it requires Advanced Education and Technology to provide the classroom experience. This will allow both the journeymen and the companies to provide those opportunities for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Next question to the same minister: are you concerned that safety will be compromised as a result of this change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of the rules around safety have changed in this province. It is incumbent upon a business and a journeyman to ensure that every workplace is safe, that every apprentice is only working on the kinds of things they've been trained to do, that they're properly supervised. This will continue to happen, and I don't believe there's any concern for safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. My final question to the same minister: why were the ratios in the remaining 13 trades untouched, and is there is a list somewhere where the employers can look it up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. To the final question 37 of our trades out of 50 were increased from 1 to 1 to 1 to 2; however, the balance of those trades, the other 13, already had ratios in excess of 1 to 1 and met the needs of those industries.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Municipal Sustainability

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Cold Lake is a classic example of an Alberta municipality that, despite being surrounded by robust oil and gas activity, is struggling to provide basic services to its citizens. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is he prepared to develop a strategy to assist these municipalities that are experiencing real challenges to their viability? There are so many.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Cold Lake continues to express concerns regarding its long-term sustainability, especially in light of the mounting infrastructure challenges that that particular city has. We've done a lot of work with the city of Cold Lake, and we're going to keep on working with them to make sure that they reach a sustainable level.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that from the minister. One of the things that I would be upset to see is that these small municipalities are dissolving themselves. How is this helping competitiveness to maintain our rural roots, and are you working with other municipalities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the ministry is certainly working with all municipalities across the province of Alberta as part of the municipal sustainability strategy. We are working with our small municipalities. We are providing financial assistance, but furthermore we are providing additional training. There is a tool kit that was developed for municipalities that is available to them to use if they are experiencing some challenges.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I wonder if the minister could give us an update on the success of how this is moving forward for Cold Lake, using that as an example for other municipalities. Is what you're doing really working?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we found out that the city of Cold Lake does have particular challenges but not much different from a lot of other cities the size of the city of Cold Lake. There is on-going work that we are doing with the base and the city to ensure that the city is sustainable. We are looking at alternatives, and we are maintaining our communications and discussions with the city of Cold Lake and the surrounding municipalities.

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

Legal Aid

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a lot about funding for legal aid, and while it's a very important service, I'm also aware that the funding provided is essentially just being used to pay for legal services. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney

General: what are you doing to ensure that the legal community is contributing their share to fund legal aid in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge, of course, that the legal community plays a huge role in the provision of legal aid services, and I want to acknowledge the work of Legal Aid Alberta, which is a separate entity from government, the role that they play in providing these services as well. There are three sources of funding for legal aid. The primary source of funding comes from our government. Also, the federal government provides funding. As well, money comes from lawyers' trust accounts through the Alberta Law Foundation to support legal aid.

Mr. Allred: Again to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: given that the funding from the legal community has been cut back considerably in the last two years – and I recognize that is a result of the interest rates being low for the trust funds – what are you doing to increase the nongovernmental sources of funding for this important program?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at all sources of funding to see what we can do. As the hon. member no doubt noticed, in the current budget we propose an increase of some 10 per cent in funding by our government. The funding from the federal government has been pretty much static for about the last 10 years. The drop has come from the Alberta Law Foundation. I haven't had a chance to talk to them yet, but I'm very interested in sitting down with them and the Law Society to see what some options might be there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that's some of my concern. The provincial funding goes up 10 per cent every year, but the funding from the other agencies is flat.

I guess my question is basically: other than full service from a lawyer, how is legal aid serving Albertans vis-à-vis the legal community?

Mr. Olson: Well, particularly in the last year there have been a number of initiatives taken to see how we might adopt a more targeted approach to providing services that will actually do people the good that they need. So rather than a cookie-cutter approach we will provide services to people that are specific to their needs. Things like legal service centres, enhanced criminal and civil duty counsel, family mediation services, and so on are all things that we're doing to address that need.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Oral Question Period. There were 19 members recognized, 114 questions.

In 15 seconds from now we are going to continue with the Routine and Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Snow Conditions in Southern Alberta

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans are saying: "Global warming. What global warming?" There are two generations, albeit one young, in southeast Alberta who have not experienced a winter such as this one. In fact, the circumstances

that contributed to the flood in June of last year and now the weather conditions this winter are having residents of southeast Alberta concerned.

Over the last year we experienced record and near-record snowfalls. Many in this Assembly will remember the serious floods caused by the spring snowfalls and huge rainfalls in our area last year. I'm sure that image of the Trans-Canada highway washing away is fresh in the minds of many members. I was pleased that the government acted to reduce the damage caused by this disaster, and I would hope that this support would never be needed again.

Back to the generation point, Mr. Speaker. I remember winters when the roads were plugged for weeks and the drifts were over the caragana hedges. In fact, my family had canned milk for my baby sister flown in to our farm by a local pilot with a small plane on skis, and our farm was only 18 miles from town.

Most of us have not seen snow like this for a long time: the huge drifts along highway 41, especially south of the Trans-Canada highway to the Cypress Hills, as well as the drifts in our yards. There has been no real chinook since the snow started falling last November. Remember that this is southern Alberta, folks, not northern Alberta, where people are perhaps more used to this. This is the prairies, folks.

For many who have snow machines, not only is the gas stale in them, but they won't start. Most don't run anymore and are so old you can no longer get parts for them. The people who have new machines and usually take winter holidays to the mountains to use them now are using them right at home for both pleasure and business.

After last year's large crops of hay many ranchers felt they had perhaps enough feed to last three years. It's not so now as many ranchers have used nearly two years of normal feed. No one is complaining badly yet, but all are very tired of the snow and worried about the spring. It's all about to melt and needs somewhere to go.

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

National Social Work Month

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on National Social Work Month. Social work began in the mid-19th century by charity workers. Social casework emerged as a new way of understanding and assisting vulnerable populations at the turn of the century with the advance of social sciences. The widespread poverty experienced during the Great Depression helped governments recognize that poverty was not only an individual's private trouble but, rather, a public issue. Since that time the social work profession has expanded its scope of practice to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society.

Today professional social work practice ranges from enhancing problem solving and coping capacities of people and systems to contributing to the development and improvement of social policy. Core values and principles of the social work profession respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and the upholding of human rights. For this reason the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Canadian Association for Social Work Education proclaimed National Social Work Month with the theme Social Workers for Dignity and Inclusion: Upholding Human Rights.

In the words of CASW President Darlene MacDonald, "The social work profession is dedicated to protecting and defending the rights of the most vulnerable in our society," and she's inviting people everywhere to celebrate the social work profession and its

dedication to bringing about inclusion and dignity for all. Accordingly, during National Social Work Month CASW and CASWE call upon all levels of government to address human rights in Canada through an integrated national plan that will reduce poverty and dedicate sufficient federal investments in social security for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta College of Social Workers is dedicating March 13 to 19 as Social Work Week in Alberta. I would like to invite my colleagues from the Alberta Assembly to recognize the role and contributions made by social workers in Alberta and Canada during this month.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 11 Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011, for first reading.

Currently legislative responsibility for the regulation of farm cervids is shared by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, ARD, and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, SRD. This change would see the transfer of legislative responsibility for farm cervids as identified in the Wildlife Act and wildlife regulation to the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011. Once the transfer is complete, ARD will have full administrative authority to administer and enforce all programs related to farm cervids.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 12 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce Bill 12, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011.

The Alberta Investment Management Corporation, or AIMCo, is responsible for managing nearly \$70 billion in investments for the government of Alberta, including the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and public-sector pension funds. This bill will clarify the government's ownership structure of the corporation to remove any ambiguity. Language around directors' conflicts of interest will also be updated to match industry standards. We're also adding an amendment to make it clear that AIMCo must act in the best interests of its clients when delivering their investment management services. The changes within Bill 12 will allow AIMCo to continue to operate effectively while managing the province's substantial assets on behalf of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta's Promise 2010 annual report. It highlights some of the success stories from the more than 1,200 partnerships Alberta's Promise has helped to develop. Since 2003 Alberta's Promise partners have made investments worth more than \$325 million to help create a brighter future for all children and youth in Alberta. For that, I would like to say thank you. To let you know, Mr. Speaker, the annual report is also available online at www.albertaspromise.org.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In support of and in anticipation of the discussion on Motion 502 this afternoon I am tabling an item bearing warning labels. They read as follows:

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.

I would also like to thank my colleague the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs for his assistance in providing this empty bottle bearing this label.

The Speaker: No. Take it home.

Mr. Amery: Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling e-mails from the following individuals, who are concerned that the Castle will be turned into the clear-cut of Cataract Creek. They come from Dan Fredrick, Jamieson Lamb, Christina Kozak, David J. Brown, Barry Geates, Taku Hokoyama, Rob Befus, Patricia Jacobson, Carolyn Waddle, Wendy Ryan, Ken Johnson, Scott Stanway, Eric Stutzman, Penny Coates, Oliver Kent, Colin Ferguson, Jill Bhar, Dale Kirschenman, Rosemary Partridge, Irwin Barrett, Harriet Allen, Susan Como, Marie-Josée Yelle, M. Tincherr, and Mike Buxton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is an e-mail from my constituent Paul Shamchuk, who is a teacher and is quite concerned about what he is hearing about the negotiations between the government, the ATA, and the ASBA concerning things around wage freeze limits on instructional time, the description of duties of teachers, the roles of principals and superintendants and is quite concerned that he can't seem to get clear answers.

My second tabling is from Benjamin Pond, who I believe is also a constituent and is concerned about the cancellation of the avion-

ics engineering technology program at NAIT. He was hoping to be able to complete his studies and move overseas to work with an organization doing medical relief work, but since the program is somewhat uncertain, he's very concerned about that.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to my other tablings today, I would like to table this very personal and tragic story posted on my website blog. It's about a good Albertan who unnecessarily suffered and prematurely died of lung cancer in 2005 during the period questioned. It's from his wife.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of postcards signed by 560 Albertans calling for greater public funding for child care. In particular, these postcards focus on the need to dedicate funding to high-quality and affordable child care, something which is sorely missing in this province. These postcards were collected as part of a campaign by the Alberta union of public employees.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of Dr. Sherman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, 33 e-mail messages from Dr. Sherman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and several with senders' names removed, to Dr. Sherman; hon. Mr. Stelmach, the Premier; hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Education; hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Energy; Mr. Horne, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford; individuals from Capital health authority, Alberta Health Services, former health regions, Paddy Meade, Spence Nichol, and several with recipients' names removed, all regarding compromised care in emergency, urgent and acute-care centres, several with an attached document entitled Sub-optimal Encounters Due to ED/System Overcrowding, one e-mail message regarding report confidentiality, and one e-mail message requesting a meeting with the hon. Mr. Hancock.

Report dated January 1, 2010, entitled Code of Conduct, prepared by Alberta Health Services.

Letter dated September 10, 2006, from Raj Sherman, MD, president, section of emergency medicine, Alberta Medical Association, to hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, regarding emergency department overcrowding.

E-mail message dated November 10, 2008, from Raj Sherman, MD, to hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness; Mr. Horne, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford; Mr. Vandermeer, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; and C. Robb, attaching an e-mail dated November 7, 2008, from Paul Parks, University of Alberta hospital, both regarding emergency department care.

Letter dated February 23, 2008, from Ed Stelmach, leader of the PC Association of Alberta, to Dr. Peter Kwan, president, section of emergency medicine of the Alberta Medical Association, regarding emergency health service standards.

Two e-mail messages, the first dated February 22, 2008, and the second dated July 3, 2008, both from Dr. Paul Parks, emergency medicine, University of Alberta hospital, to hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, and hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister

of Health and Wellness, regarding overcrowding in hospital emergency departments.

Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons article dated fall 2004 entitled Editorial: Abuse of the "Disruptive Physician" Clause.

Report dated April 15, 2010, entitled Disruptive Behaviour prepared by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta Physician Health Monitoring Committee.

Document dated April 2010 entitled CPSA Code of Conduct.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202

Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, it's 10 minutes speaking time. There is no Standing Order 29(2)(a). The first three speakers recognized will be the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. To this point in time I have 14 members who have indicated their interest.

Proceed, please.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand in this Assembly and move second reading of Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, before speaking to what this bill is about, I'd like to first speak to what it is not about. This bill is not meant to be any kind of attack on the integrity or worth of members in this House. Despite my often serious disagreements over policy issues with different members of this Legislature, especially those across the way, I have the highest respect for anyone who is willing to sacrifice years of their life to serve the public. I know how hard everyone in this House works. I know the financial sacrifices many of us have made to do this work. I know that it's often a thankless job. I know that we are often unjustly accused and that expectations on our time are often impossible to fulfill, and then the time that we do commit is generally unrecognized or grossly understated. I know that the time away from loved ones is an ongoing painful sacrifice and a constant balancing act.

My purpose in this bill is not to criticize or undervalue the members of this House, their service, or their worth to this province. My purpose is to do the opposite. The purpose of this bill, in part, is to help restore the reputation of this House and its members, which has, whether we care to admit it or not, been tarnished by the perception, and much of it is justified, that provincial politicians are filling their pockets with cash while our province is mired in the worst string of deficits in recent history.

A 34 per cent increase to cabinet salaries behind closed doors only worsened what was already a disdain for politicians setting their own generous salaries and benefits. This is seen after every election cycle as retiring MLAs walk away with severance packages that look more like a winning lottery ticket than severance packages to the average Albertan. And every time it happens, Albertans shake their heads in collective disgust and disappointment. Talk to anyone outside the walls of this Legislature about these salary hikes and severances, and they will roll their eyes and they'll sigh loudly and they'll have a look of unsurprised but still very serious disappointment.

My fellow members, we need to do better than this. We need to set an example of integrity and frugality and fairness. When Albertans look at us, they need to have confidence stemming from our actions and not just our rhetoric that we perceive ourselves as the servants of the people of this province rather than politicians who feel that the people of Alberta are there to financially serve us. Albertans are craving this kind of leadership. They want to believe the best about the intentions, the integrity, and desires of those serving in this House, their leaders, but we need to give them a reason for feeling thus.

Bill 202 is by no means a silver bullet in strengthening public confidence in this Legislature or in its members, but it is a start, and it's a large one at that. Bill 202 is simple and straightforward. It would lower the formula for MLA transition allowances by two-thirds on a go-forward basis. This means that on the day this bill is passed, if passed, MLAs will earn one month of salary for every one year served up to a maximum of 12 months' salary for 12 years of service. All severance earned by MLAs under the current formula of three months for every year served will be respected and paid out upon the retirement of a currently serving member of this Legislature, but the new, more modest formula would apply for any time served by an MLA after the passage of this bill until the time they retire or are replaced by voters.

The amount of one month for every year served to a maximum of 12 months is much more in line with private sector severance packages as seen in case law. It is still on the generous side, in my opinion, but it is within reason. It is within the ballpark, as they say. It will give a departing MLA some funds to live on while they transition to a new job, if they so choose. This is what transition and severance packages are for. They are meant to help newly out-of-work former employees pay the bills while they find another job or secure another source of income. They are not meant, nor should they be, to act as a generous pension fund or, even worse, a winning lottery ticket.

3:00

I will not recite the large amounts of severance due to members of this House upon their retirement nor the circumstances surrounding the passing of the current severance formula. This would be counterproductive at this point. I'm here to look forward to the future. 2011 is not 2001. We live in a different time with much different challenges. The world's economic future and, most unsettling, the economic future of our greatest economic ally, the United States, is entirely unsure. Although our provincial and national economies have been sheltered from the worst of the world economic downturn due to our vast natural resources, we have not been entirely immune, obviously. The days of \$7 billion surpluses have been replaced with \$7 billion cash shortfalls due to exasperating overspending and a slowdown in provincial revenue growth.

The two most recent record deficits of Budget 2010 and, as announced last week, Budget 2011 will result in almost the entire depletion of our province's savings fund. We must correct our financial course, and we must do so soon, or we shall risk a return to annual debt financing, tax increases, or steep cuts to core social programs. We run the risk of squandering our province's highest income-earning years because we were unable to restrain ourselves from overgoring on all-you-can-eat spending buffets rather than prudently planning and saving for our and our children's uncertain economic futures.

Will Bill 202 balance the budget? No, it won't, not by a long shot by any means. But it will change the tone. It will show leadership. It will show a willingness by the leadership of this

province to cut back on that which is unnecessarily generous. It is an opportunity to lead by example.

How can we expect our hard-working public servants in Health, Education, as well as others to agree to have their salaries indexed to the cost of living, for example, or roughly 2 to 3 per cent per year, when MLAs have their salaries indexed to the average weekly wage index, which is constantly more generous and, even worse, raise their salaries 34 per cent behind closed doors? It's not fair to ask anybody to cut back in the public service if we're unwilling to show an example ourselves.

So it is with all benefits. Why should the public service lower their hopes for more lucrative and expensive benefits packages when MLAs are walking away with severance packages in the high six or even seven figures? The answer is that we as a government and as a House have no right to ask them to moderate their expectations until we have shown by our actions that we are willing to moderate our own. Perhaps the abhorrent severance packages paid out by this government to individuals such as Dr. Duckett and Jack Davis or Paddy Meade and many others are products of the poor example that we have set.

My fellow members, we are the elected representatives of the people of our great and unique communities, the face of our great province. We must act like it. We must act above all reproach.

When I was first elected, one of my favourite MLAs, one of the greatest gentlemen and statesmen of this Assembly, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, gave me this short poem, which I would like to share. The author was a man named Andrew Oliver, who lived from 1706 to 1774 and was a British Loyalist in America during the lead-up to the American Revolution. His poem was entitled Politics. It reads thus:

Politics is the most hazardous of all professions. There is not another in which a man can hope to do so much good to his fellow creatures, neither is there any in which by a mere loss of nerve he may do such widespread harm; nor is there another in which he may so easily lose his . . . soul, nor is there another in which a positive and strict veracity is so difficult. But danger is the inseparable companion of honour. With all the temptations and degradations that beset it, politics is still the noblest career any man [or woman] can choose.

May we in this House live up to this idealism. May we help restore the nobility of our profession in the eyes of Albertans. Passing Bill 202 will work slowly towards this goal, and I ask every member of this House to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, then Calgary-Buffalo, then the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, then Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I always enjoy about debating private members' bills is that in the Official Opposition caucus these are free votes, so I'm looking forward to hearing my colleagues' points of view on this because I know that in at least one case they don't agree with me. But here we go.

In reacting to the ideas that are put forward in Bill 202, sponsored by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, he's right. We are dealing with public perception of what we do. He's also right in that the source of our biggest public perception problems these days is us, when we stand up in this House or in debate and we talk about how others are challenged with veracity and are lying low and are snake oil salesmen and all of the other trivialization that happens when we speak one to each other in this House. When I ask a question, I'm regularly greeted by the front bench

members standing up, and first they demean me, and then they trivialize the subject that I've raised. It's pretty common stuff. The biggest creators of this problem is ourselves.

As well, hon. member, this is an easy target. It's a popular one with the public, who don't really understand what we do, and it's very easy to find anyone who thinks that a politician is overpaid.

One of the things that isn't well known is that after 40 years of one-political-party rule in Alberta there isn't a lot of experience in what happens to people that serve in the opposition benches, and I'm going to spend my time talking about that. Indeed, the hon. member and his party has had some small experience in things like trying to get funding for your caucus, and that's more complicated than you anticipated, no doubt. In fact, I bet you were a little surprised to find out you were going to have to fight for funding for your caucus just so you could go to work every day and have enough staff to type up a letter or help you write a question. But that is what happens in this province, so we have to deal with it.

I will tell you that the issue of resettlement allowances, or transition allowances, for MLAs in opposition who lose their seat, resign, or die in public office is a very different experience than, I'm sure, what happens on the government side. For starters, in my experience – and I'll be specific to what I'm aware of – there's no soft landing for someone in the Official Opposition. I cannot see government ever appointing this gal to an agency, board, or commission that carries a salary with it. I just don't think that's going to happen. I don't think you're going to see me as head of the northern Alberta development committee or any of those kinds of things. That just doesn't happen to members of the opposition, but there are lots of examples you can find where previous members on the government side, indeed, were placed in those positions. I can't see a lobbying firm that's going to be seeking me out to work for them because of the instant access that I have to my former colleagues and buddies in the government cabinet. That's not going to happen for a member of the opposition either.

I can tell you that with three exceptions all of my colleagues that I have worked with and who are no longer in the opposition benches for one reason or another took at least two years to find a replacement job that paid a reasonable salary. At least two years to find another job with a reasonable salary. Not a big salary, not a wonderful job; just a replacement for what they were earning as an opposition bench MLA. The three exceptions were members I've served with who were teachers, who, in fact, had their full teacher's pension; the small business owners and entrepreneurs, who had an entrepreneurial position they could move back into like real estate; and three of my colleagues who went into municipal politics. Two years to find another reasonable-paying job. So the idea that you're going to get one year of a transition allowance: not sure what you're supposed to do for the second year.

The last opposition member on this side who qualified for the pension that the previous Premier stopped in 1993 was Grant Mitchell, now Senator Mitchell, who was elected in 1986 and retired in '98. He had to totally retrain. He took his settlement allowance and totally retrained into a different career in order to have a job to continue on with because he was in his mid-50s when he left the Legislature.

3:10

I believe strongly that the Legislature should be a mirror of the public. It should be a mirror of the people that we represent. So I am delighted when I can look around and I can see police officers and people who were nurses or long-term care geriatric staff, who were farmers and real estate agents and pharmacists and lawyers. A wide, wide range of the public. I'll tell you, I come from the not-for-profit sector. Not that common coming into politics, I'll

give you, but it's very unlikely that when I leave politics or I'm not re-elected, I'm going to find another job in the sector that I came from. Probably the fault of the not-for-profit sector, who will self-censor and go: we can't possibly hire her because it would jeopardize any grant or contract that we might be getting from the government if we've got her on our payroll. And that may not be true, but they will believe that it will be true. It may well be true. I don't know.

As I said, I'm not going to get hired by a lobbyist. I'm not going to be appointed to a job with a salary that's a government appointment. So I'm going to have to go back to school because the degree that I had is not going to get me another job, and neither will I be able to move into a master's program with any kind of ease. I've already talked to people along the way, and it's been made pretty clear that I'm going to have to do at least a year's qualifying before I can get into a master's program. So I'm looking at three years of university, not earning any money but certainly spending it for tuition and for living, in order to be at a point where I as a member of the Official Opposition will likely get another reasonable job.

I'm not complaining. To be perfectly honest, the settlement amount that is offered now is a heck of a lot better than what was offered when I was first elected. I came in knowing that. So this is a much, much better deal, but the idea that is proposed by the member putting forward Bill 202 I don't think quite understands how difficult it can be to be a member of an opposition in a place with a government that's been in place for 40 years.

Well, times are volatile. Things could change. Things could change in the next election. In fact, I'm sure that members from the party that the member represents are counting on the fact that his folks are going to be sitting on the other side next time. Fair enough. But does that mean that there will still be an understanding? When you travel and talk to other politicians, governments change. People end up on both sides of the aisles. They have a good idea of what it's like to be in opposition and be in government. If you've been around for 10 or 15 years, you very likely would have served on both sides of the House. So there's a much clearer understanding of the limitations that exist on both sides.

The other small thing that I'm always aware of is that the resettlement is based on the best three years of earning. Now, here government members consistently earn more than opposition members because they are paid, for example, for sitting on cabinet policy committees or to chair various things like the Seniors Advisory Council. So even though I may have been considered a private member right along with one of the government backbenchers, they will consistently have outearned me or been paid more than I have been paid. That, of course, is included in the calculation when you look at the resettlement allowance. If they consistently made that \$20,000 or \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year more than any member in the opposition, when you base the resettlement on it, they're going to be getting more resettlement allowance based on that as well.

So there is a real inequity here and a misunderstanding about that. I appreciate the opportunity to put it on the record. I bet most people are not aware of it. I will soon be celebrating my 14th anniversary as an elected member in this House, moving into my 15th year, so I'm able to bring you a bit of an historical vignette if you will. Thank you for the opportunity to put that information on the record. I do think we need to do something, but it's about an independent commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to speak to Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011, brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. This bill would amend the Legislative Assembly Act. It would abolish the transition allowance that members currently receive upon leaving office. As it stands right now, when members leave office, they receive three months' salary for each year as an MLA in the name of the transition allowance. Under Bill 202 members would instead receive a retirement allowance, which would be worth no more than one month's pay for each year served.

Mr. Speaker, I think MLA compensation is, of course, an important topic to discuss, and our compensation should be in line with public expectations and the demands placed upon us. However, it is important to look at the issue of MLA compensation in its totality rather than looking at one part of it.

I'd like to read a few paragraphs from the report of the Independent Commission to Review MLA Compensation from British Columbia in 2007, which was the last province to look at their compensation package. It states:

Few positions are more important to our status as a free and democratic society than those of our elected representatives. Our MLAs collectively make laws that affect the lives of the 4.31 million residents of the province, which is now the third largest in Canada.

This is of course talking about British Columbia.

Their position has become more challenging in recent years as the complexity of social, economic and environmental issues continues to increase.

Our MLAs are expected to exercise judgement and make decisions that involve millions of dollars and affect the immediate quality of life of individuals, as well as the long-term success of the province overall. No other group in our province has such a significant impact on our lives. Unfortunately, few members of the public fully understand the responsibilities and burdens shouldered by MLAs collectively or individually.

As citizens, we expect our MLAs to be available to handle a host of issues from the minor and personal to the strategic and global. We demand that decisions be made for the benefit of our families, neighbourhoods and businesses, often without remembering that there are few issues where others see the result in exactly the same light as we do. Like legislators elsewhere, our MLAs must continually balance competing interests and regularly face issues where they know that no resolution will satisfy all interested parties.

Members live their lives under constant public scrutiny, to which their families are also often subjected. The concept of a private life or a "normal" family environment disappears the moment an MLA is elected. There is no job security and often few job prospects and little thanks when the position comes to an end. One may ask why anyone would voluntarily subject themselves to such a working environment. The reality is that very few MLAs themselves understand the demands of the position, the significance of their responsibilities, the impact of their decisions and the intensity of the media attention until they are elected.

Mr. Speaker, because of its singular focus on one aspect of MLA compensation I believe that Bill 202 is an incomplete piece of legislation which misses the big picture. After all, the transition allowance is only a part of the compensation we receive as MLAs. We also receive expense allowances and stipends for serving on certain committees, and of course we also receive a base salary. Looking at the transition allowance in isolation without looking at the remainder of our compensation package does not really address the important question of whether or not MLA compensation is fair.

This is because the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere simplifies the conversation about MLA pay by proposing this legislation.

Of course, as all members of this House surely know, we do not have a pension plan to which we contribute, and this differentiates us from every other provincial Legislature. Therefore, comparisons between our compensation and that of elected officials in other jurisdictions are not always easy to make given that slight differences in pension rules or allowances can make a large difference in total compensation. Furthermore, our lack of pension differentiates us from other public servants in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to comment from the Independent Commission to Review MLA Compensation on pension arrangements, and this is MLA benefits, one of the recommendations that was accepted:

We recommend the termination of the Group RRSP and the reinstatement of a defined benefit plan. The plan will be effective from April 1, 2007 and contain the following key provisions:

- A benefit accrual rate of 3.5% of the highest three-year average earnings (with the benefit calculated separately on the member's basic salary and on any additional salary earned), to a maximum of 70% of the three-year average earnings.

When you cost this out, this is a tremendous package, which is a lot more expensive than the package we have now.

Of course, as all members of this House surely know, we do not have a pension plan to which we contribute, and this differentiates us from other provincial Legislatures. The reality is that pensions are important as they provide financial security through the duration of retirement for many individuals. The lack of a pension is a drawback in our compensation structure as it increases the uncertainty members face upon re-entering the workforce or retiring. To be clear, I'm not advocating a renewal of MLA pensions, but I think that talking about a transition allowance without giving serious consideration to the fact that we do not have pensions is an important omission on his behalf.

Another point I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that I believe that this legislation sets a precedent going forward for MLA compensation that we may not want to establish. I don't think it's appropriate to simply legislate limits on one part of an MLA compensation package while ignoring the rest of it. I am saying that we should not simply have legislation for every rule we wish we could make regarding MLA compensation.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I think also, in looking at the report from British Columbia, there are a number of observations. The commission did a phone survey of 601 B.C. adults.

- BC residents express a limited knowledge of the number of MLAs. On the question of "How many MLAs do you think are in the BC Legislature?" answers ranged from 1 to 500, with the average being 64 (median 55), but only 1.2% had the correct answer of 79.
- B.C. residents believe that MLAs work on average only 38 hours a week, and 196 days out of the year (equivalent to 5 days a week with 13 weeks off for holidays).
- When it comes to compensation, 51.9% think MLA salary is about right, with 34.8% believing it's too high and 15.1% thinking it's too low. However, few of the respondents knew how much MLAs earn, with only 20% coming within 10% of the real salary. The mean perceived average salary was \$195,824, with 39% overestimating the annual base salary.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that over half of the MLAs responded to the survey. It's also interesting that the majority of

respondents were married, with a university degree, typically in middle age, 45 to 60, and few had children still living at home.

The average length of service was also interesting, only 6.72 years.

- The MLAs uniformly reported working long hours, averaging 70 hours a week when the House is sitting, and 62 hours when not – the more rural the constituency, the shorter the work week,

which I find interesting because I find in my position that the farther away we are from the Legislature, the longer our days are.

- A typical day in the life of an MLA is a very busy one. On any given day of the week, an MLA receives 77 incoming emails, 17 incoming calls, 13 phone interactions and attends 7 meetings.

Mr. Speaker, I can only imagine a successful company asking for a review of an executive pension one month, then executive allowances another month, and then executive bonuses yet another month. It would be an inefficient process to look at compensation one piece at a time, yet this legislation would set a precedent for MLA compensation being set piecemeal rather than all at once. Of course, if a piecemeal approach to setting MLA compensation is used rather than a holistic approach, an inefficient overall package is the likely result.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that MLA compensation is an important subject. We all know that. There's no doubt that we should be open and transparent about our compensation so that Albertans could judge for themselves whether or not the pay is justified. But to change our compensation package one stage at a time rather than doing it all at once is not the best way of doing things. These one-off ideas are an inefficient means of restructuring MLA pay and in the long run are costly to the taxpayers. Right now the Members' Services Committee has in front of it the issue of MLA remuneration. I believe that's where it should be.

For those reasons I will not be supporting this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and then the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak to this bill being brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I believe the subject of our MLA transition allowance on the narrow point and, more importantly, MLA compensation to the larger extent are very important for us to discuss here, important not only to us here who work in this environment but to the taxpayers of Alberta. We have to walk the fine line here of not only representing what is best value for the constituents but also looking at ways where we can attract decent people to the profession. Those are awfully difficult things to balance.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

This is a politically sensitive issue, how much we make, and rightfully it should be. Yet, again, we do want people from all stripes, from any profession to be willing to consider serving as either a member of government or a member of opposition and not really look at the pay, to realize that they are going to be recompensed for the time they spend in this Legislature, to commit four, eight, 12 years of their life to this and realize that they're going to get a reasonable salary but that it may have some repercussions on other things they want to do in their lives. That's a decision that we all must make.

To that end, if you look at this, in my view, it would be better, like the hon. Member for West Yellowhead just said, to look at this in its totality. I believe that has been the position of the Alberta Liberals for some time. You will remember when job number one of this government, I believe, was to put through pay raises not only for rank-and-file MLAs but for cabinet ministers and the like. That was the first thing we did as a Legislature. That, in my view, was a piecemeal exercise. We didn't look at the compensation of retirement packages at that time. It may have been done with a view to attracting decent and honourable people to the profession, but it still was done piecemeal.

I don't believe I supported it being done then, and to be consistent, I probably will not be supporting this bill as a result of this not being done within that total compensation realm.

On that note, if you look at a three-month transition period, it does seem somewhat large when you compare it to a regular package out there in private industry. Now, there could be reasons for that. One reason is because we leave professions in the middle of our careers, and we have to then go back and start over again. I understand that. But to try and debate those in a one-off session, where we're looking at different moving pieces of the puzzle, I believe would not be supportive to the larger issue.

I believe that the situation that we are faced with now should go ahead to our Members' Services Committee. We should commend the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, who brought this forward I believe approximately a year ago at this time, to look at MLA pay and to have an independent committee come back and set a reasonable benchmark, where we can go ahead and have an independent committee set that pay and be proud of the fact that an independent committee came up with a reasonable pay.

I'm not one who comes in here and says that we're overpaid. In fact, I make the argument all the time that I want my politicians to be reasonably paid. I want them to come in here with an ability to take a wage to do their best service. At the same time, you have to be able to look your taxpayer in the eye that you're giving them value for judgment. In my view, we should look at this as a total compensation package and go forward and do it but to two ends, attracting people from all walks of life to come into government service and with the same view of being able to then balance that off against public perception. In my view, that is best done through the auspices of Motion 501, not through Bill 202.

That said, I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing this forward, for keeping the pressure on the government, for trying to look at MLA pay in a total fashion. What happened back in 2008, when we were elected: job number one of this government was to ram through some pay increases. I was quite surprised at that. I believe that one of the reasons the hon. member continues to bring this up at this time is to continue to have the government move forward on Motion 501. I know that they've stated in this House that they will, but with a new administration coming in, whoever that may be, we wish to keep this topic front and centre, and hopefully this can be worked out in future sessions of this Legislature in an open, honest, and transparent fashion that will serve all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to this bill, Bill 202.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A lot of good comments, I think, from all the previous members who have spoken about this particular bill, Bill 202. I want to acknowledge first

that MLA compensation is a sensitive issue, and it has to be perceived as fair in the public eye but also fair to all members, so there's a balance that you need to actually achieve. Our salaries, like everything else in the public sector, are paid, of course, with taxpayers' dollars. The money just doesn't appear magically out of somewhere; it comes out of someone's hard-earned tax dollars. That's something that we also have to respect in dealing with any compensation, not just our own, in the public sector.

In proposing this bill, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked to several media outlets about this. You know, I think it's important that we do have this particular debate, but in order to have a productive debate, we have to be a little more specific, Mr. Speaker. We must be sure to look at some comparables, and the Member for West Yellowhead, before me, has done that. I also think that we need to look across the entire country at what our MLAs and MPs are paid for. Most jurisdictions have a pension, which I'll deal with shortly. If one wants to compare member benefits from workers in the public or private sector, you have to be prepared to talk about total compensation. You have to weigh MLAs' duties against those of individuals with similar workloads, responsibilities, and job stability.

I have to agree with previous members, Mr. Speaker, that everybody here works long, hard hours and that it involves a significant amount of travel unless you're from the capital region. Even then, this is a job that does involve a lot of hours. We're here because we want to serve the public. That is what public service is about.

Dealing with compensation is not an impossible task by any means, but at the same time it's not as simplistic as this bill, in fact, would imply. Perhaps a starting point would be to compare ourselves with other Canadian jurisdictions. After all, the best comparison would be with other MLAs or the federal Parliament. So here are some facts, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I think it's important to note that a transition allowance is not a pension. As I've stated before in this House and outside of this House, I do not support MLA pensions of any kind. A transition allowance is a one-time payment whereas a pension is a longer term liability which gives the retiree some certainty during retirement.

Alberta differs from other provinces and, of course, the federal Parliament in that in many cases there is a pension in addition to a transition allowance, and of course this isn't the case in Alberta. I'll repeat this again, Mr. Speaker. Alberta MLAs are not entitled to a pension plan like their colleagues in other jurisdictions. In fact, it was the PC government, Ralph Klein, of 1993 who did away with pensions here once and for all, and I hope that these pensions never come back.

More specifically, most of our colleagues from other Canadian provinces receive what is known as a defined benefits pension plan – that's opposed to a defined contributions pension plan – meaning that the amount they receive for their pension is, in fact, fixed. This is in contrast with a defined contributions plan, which is what Ontario and Saskatchewan elected officials receive, where the amount received varies with the market.

Most jurisdictions, in fact, Mr. Speaker, allow an individual to collect a pension before they reach a set retirement age. Members receive their pension as long as they live, so the cost of a pension can be very significant for taxpayers.

I did a bit of a calculation here earlier, Mr. Speaker. I have a friend who is a Member of Parliament in an Ontario riding, and he laughed to me early last year that he passed the six-year mark. I started doing some calculations. With federal pensions you receive 3 per cent per every year you serve after you get to six years. So if you presume that they make about \$200,000, after he turns 55, if he quits today, he'll get \$36,000 a year. Presuming he lives until

85, that's \$720,000 whereas if he serves six years in this House, presuming that he'd make \$120,000, if he retired after that point, he'd receive \$180,000. Now, we know which one is obviously more expensive and why many people here don't support pensions, in fact why Premier Klein had the wisdom to go and do away with it in the first place.

On top of that, some of these provincial pensions are actually indexed. I found that Nova Scotia's pension is indexed to a portion of the rate of inflation every year, so they can be quite generous, Mr. Speaker.

I don't want to get into too many details, but pension benefits are calculated typically, again, by the amount of time the member has served, to a maximum of 15 years, multiplied by the MLA's highest three-year average salary. It's been noted upon leaving office that you do receive some inflationary increase. This typically gets to a full pension once you reach age 55, which is substantially lower than the CPP age of 65, or 60 if you take early CPP. This policy has led to several members across the country actually receiving pensions of close to a hundred thousand dollars a year, Mr. Speaker.

Other provinces are in similar situations. The bottom line is that MLAs in other jurisdictions receive a transition allowance and a pension plan, and the taxpayers will have to pay sometimes seven figures each year to keep up with pension payments for previous members of the particular Assembly or Parliament.

Another example is the Premier of British Columbia, who's going to be leaving office right away here. Upon leaving office, he's entitled to an annual pension estimated to be in the six figures, again, on top of a transition allowance. So this is very costly for taxpayers.

In other words, what we're seeing today, Mr. Speaker, though, is that the devil is in the details, and this gets to the point of why I cannot support this particular bill. The perception people have of politics and all politicians can be challenging to all parties, and we must be careful not to devalue the work done by this province's elected officials of any party. In other words, all angles must be examined, and the right balance must be struck through maintaining the status quo or otherwise. I submit to this House that this balance must be tailored to the reality of the province and to the particular Assembly. This bill itself is two pages, and with a bill of two pages I don't think we can have a comprehensive debate over total compensation.

The speaker before me, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, has shown strong support for his review of an MLA compensation package as proposed in the previous sitting of this Assembly by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. Motion 501 passed with strong support from both sides of the House. For the record I did vote for it. It's important that this committee that she talks about actually works through the process. We need a global review. I look to the clients whose contracts I would negotiate in my previous life. You wouldn't just simply reach an agreement on one clause in the contract and then move forward thinking that you're done. You'd reach a global agreement on all of these particular clauses, and that's what I think is most effective here as well.

Motion 501, as I mentioned, states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government [of Alberta] to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for [all] members is fair and adequate.

The Member for West Yellowhead has made a lot of good comments, and I trust his background in labour negotiations is very helpful here. I would have to agree with a lot of what he says

because, in fact, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 as it stands today, I would submit to this House, is poor public policy as it runs against the decision made by members of this Assembly for, in fact, a comprehensive review, which is exactly what we should be doing and what all members of all parties should actually be co-operating with instead of not submitting their committee members as discussed in a September 17 meeting.

Mr. Speaker, I'm saddened that this bill was brought forward when we all knew exactly what was going to be happening. I trust the intention is noble. I trust it's not just the desire to make oneself conspicuous. I trust it is to actually have an ongoing debate. I think that's, in fact, what we're having here.

This definitely isn't the place to debate compensation for MLAs. This is not the place. The proper place is the Members' Services Committee and not just on one particular basis, Mr. Speaker, but on a global and a comprehensive basis. That is what I support. Let's have the independent committee go through this all, and let's not deal with this one clause at a time in a two-page bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before we continue, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Assembly, for giving me the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a person very special and important to me, my son, Jeremy Jablonski. Tomorrow, March 8, it will be 36 years ago that my husband, Bob, and I had a dream come true, when our son was born.

Today Jeremy is a very successful entrepreneur who is deeply involved with his community. He's the CEO of the Coverall Shop and Clearwater spa. He's the chairman of the Red Deer College athletics leadership fund, the past chair of the RDC Alumni Association. He's a member of the Red Deer College Foundation board, a member of the Central Alberta Economic Partnership, of the Red Deer College fund development advisory committee, and he's past co-chair, for the years 2009-2010, of the central Alberta Premier's dinner. He's a member of the Red Deer-North PC Association, and he's the father of two beautiful and brilliant little girls, Camryn and Morgan Jablonski.

I would ask my son, Jeremy Jablonski, to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

3:40 Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 202 Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A proud mom and grandma, obviously.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak to Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011, put forward by my caucus colleague the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. In times of financial deficits Albertans are expecting changes from the top. This bill, I believe, satisfies some of those demands. As a result of this bill, elected officials will receive one month's salary for every year of service up to 12 months' salary as they transition into private life. This seems fair to me. It strikes a balance that Albertans can appreciate. There should be a level of support for elected officials as they move back to private employment. It shouldn't be a million-dollar golden parachute but enough to help them land on their feet.

Mr. Speaker, when I first ran for office, I knocked on doors to meet the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek, and they were truly upset at what were overly generous pensions for their elected representatives. Albertans wanted public servants to be treated with respect, but the situation in the past seemed fundamentally wrong. In the early '90s we as a province and country were struggling. Unemployment was high, economic growth was sluggish, and governments across the country were running deficits and adding debt. To see elected officials collecting generous pensions did not ring true with Albertans. The greatest leaders set an example for others. The Premier at the time, Ralph Klein, made the right decision when he made changes to the pension plan for MLAs. What should have been a benefit for public service was in reality a luxury parachute with lots of goodies. Albertans couldn't expect this for themselves; why should they for their elected representatives?

The elimination of the pension package didn't deter quality candidates from stepping forward. The class of '93 was one of the best Alberta had ever seen. It tackled deficit spending and debt accumulation and led the way as Canada turned its fiscal ship around. It made tough decisions that others had avoided. Alberta walked the talk, and it showed real leadership and great sacrifice to leave a better future for our children. Great leaders, Mr. Speaker, are never complacent. They never say: good enough. They consistently try to leave the world a better place. I'm proud of the earlier years, and so are Albertans.

As I talk to my constituents, I'm starting to feel a sense of déjà vu; I have a familiar feeling. We are living through record deficits in this province, the highest we've ever had. We have a government that cannot control its spending. The average Albertan doesn't feel like their leaders are listening. They don't feel that they are part and parcel of what Alberta should be.

It's hard for Albertans to believe that we're right back where we started. The sacrifices made by all during the '90s now seem like a dream. We're about to run our fourth straight deficit. In no time at all our sustainability fund will be empty; the piggybank will be nothing but a paperweight. It seems strange that the government has no memory of where we came from. We're right back where we started, Mr. Speaker.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Alberta is the success it is because we endure. We shoulder our burdens and keep driving forward. It's time for elected members to once again lead the way with sacrifice. We're all in this together. Some civil servants have had their pay frozen for years; other positions have not been filled. We're asking more of everyone. Now it's time for MLAs to give a little. To Albertans this government has taken too much and for too long. In 2008 the government gave itself a 34 per cent pay increase behind closed doors. After much public outrage there were some rollbacks, but to the Marthas and Henrys it wasn't enough to fix the broken trust. The Premier continues to be the highest paid in the country.

Not only was the pay increase bad policy; it sent the wrong message to Albertans, that politicians only care for themselves.

Quite frankly, Albertans have every right to that opinion. It's how it looks. Because the government is looking out for itself, we suggest that a sacrifice has to be made. Going forward, there are changes that must happen. For every year of service MLAs will receive a month's salary up to 12 months. This is reasonable to Albertans. It's balanced; it's a middle ground between all and nothing.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm the beneficiary of the current system. As I was elected in 1993 for the first time, it's the only system I've ever known. The only rules I've known are the rules that are in place right now. I've made my future plans based on the rules we have now, but that doesn't mean that I'm against change. I think it's time to move forward and show Albertans that we can lead again. That's why I'm standing up and supporting Bill 202.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be an MLA. I've never shied away from the tough decisions; neither has the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. He and I together made some difficult decisions to change parties. I was a proud member of the government for many years, but I lost faith. Albertans are losing faith in this government also. They had a faith that assured them that the elected representatives have the best interests of their constituents at heart, and that faith is wavering.

The Member for West Yellowhead talks about the whole package. It was his boss, the Premier of the province, that committed to establishing a committee to look at the salaries and the benefits, the whole package, after the motion from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East passed in this House unanimously last year. The Premier gave his word at looking at it, and he has now broken his word.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans do not shy away from tough decisions. We take pride in making the toughest. It's time the politicians in this Assembly made a tough decision. It's time for us to show leadership. It's time to do what's right. In the '90s we led the way by balancing the budgets. We balanced our personal budgets, too. It's time again to make tough decisions. Albertans are ready to lead, and so am I.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to share some thoughts and comments on Bill 202, forwarded by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. If passed, this bill would change the formula used to issue allowances to MLAs when they retire from political life and would stipulate that a member would be eligible to receive a transition allowance of no more than one month's pay for every year worked to a maximum of 12 months.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, this gives us a chance to talk about compensation and the role it plays in supporting our democracies. Perhaps the best way to explain this is to take a look at the history of parliamentary democracy. As we all know, our system of government evolved from the Westminster system practised in England. This system, in turn, came to be through a series of historical events too lengthy to mention here today, but what is worth mentioning is the pay structure of MPs at that time or, rather, the lack thereof.

For many years the elected representatives in our founding system were not paid for their service. Rather, they were expected to cover their expenses through their own financing. This meant that only the very wealthy could sit as a Member of Parliament. Not surprisingly, with a House comprised primarily of wealthy individuals, the issues of the wealthy always took precedence over

those of the poor or less fortunate. Paying elected representatives to serve has allowed people who might not otherwise have been able to have their voice heard and serve in office. The talents required for good governance are not limited to the wealthy but, instead, are held by all those who earnestly wish to serve and improve the communities they call home. It stands to reason, Mr. Speaker, that these talents are all found in the members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, after establishing the need for compensation, the question then becomes a matter of: well, how much? Compensation is intended to ensure that all people, regardless of personal wealth, can enter the political process. This means that the compensation figure set by government needs to reflect three key considerations: first, the cost of living in the province, county, or city; second, the cost of conducting business as elected members – what does the job entail? – and, finally, the cost of compensation for service or, in simpler terms, the amount of money a member should have left over for his or her own personal use.

Mr. Speaker, the first point, cost of living, is very subjective and can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. One city or province may have a much higher or lower cost of living compared to another area. The second consideration is also very subjective and most notably so for rural representatives. Rural members often need to travel great distances to meet their constituents, and many require several constituency offices, and they also need to travel regularly, of course, to the capital city. These three points are all very relevant and should be taken into consideration whenever the issue of compensation is brought before this House.

While I agree with all these points, I feel, though, that a fourth point should be taken into account in this debate. That issue is, of course, competition, Mr. Speaker. Governments at all levels have to compete with other sectors of the economy to attract the brightest and the best. We are all looking for a few exceptional individuals who can successfully and effectively lead, be it in government, business, or the charitable sector. Compensation in government must be attractive enough so as not to detract individuals who are in the prime of their careers from seeking elected office. The individuals most suited to contribute to our governing process quite often find themselves having to decide whether or not to interrupt their careers during their most productive earning years.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, this is a major decision that affects not only the lives of these persons but the lives of their family members and their ability to adequately provide for their needs today and in their retirement. I'm intimately aware of this as I'm currently in my 19th year of public service, having been first elected to city council in Leduc at 34 years of age. I left a thriving business in 2004, when I was sworn in as an MLA, because I wanted to dedicate myself completely to serving my constituents.

Compensation in the Legislature can never completely replace opportunities lost in the private sector, but it should reflect a reality that the skill sets required to be an effective MLA should be reasonably compensated both while the member serves and provide some reasonable allowance to allow the member to transition back to private life.

Let's not forget that in our society today, Mr. Speaker – and it was raised by some of the other members earlier – it is not easy for anyone, male or female, to easily move into another career, particularly when they reach middle age. We should not have a situation where serving in this House is seen as a detriment to one's career or future. If this were to become the case, the people of Alberta would miss out on a great deal of talent.

Mr. Speaker, some years ago the pension plan was disbanded because it was viewed by the public as not appropriate or consistent with anything available in the private sector. I believe that the decision was short sighted as what was required was an appropriate revamp of the plan. In later years the transition allowance as we know it today was instituted. While this allowance is an easy target for criticism, experts in the pension industry believe that it is a much cheaper alternative for the taxpayer than a comparable pension.

It is never easy for elected officials to discuss compensation, and that is very evident in the history of this subject in this House. There have been numerous reviews conducted by private agencies or academia over the years, and the usual conclusion led to recommendations of very large increases relative to the talent level and the amount of effort required for the job. These recommendations have never been followed as they were all seen to be too rich. I expect the same result if another similar study were to be commissioned today.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is already the subject of a motion brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and it is before the Members' Services Committee. I am very confident that a reasonable, comprehensive solution will be found through an all-party process and not a piecemeal solution as proposed by this hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this bill. I encourage all parties represented in this Assembly to provide positive input to the committee, as proposed in the motion by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of hon. members have made reference to Motion 501, first proposed by our hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I believe that the solution lies in an independent committee as opposed to any type of influence from MLAs setting their own salaries. Whether it's the Members' Services Committee or one of the standing policy committees, I don't believe we should be setting our own salaries. We're servants of the public, and the public, through an independent committee, should determine our worth. Obviously, if people feel that that worth isn't sufficient, then they may not consider public office. But it's that independence that is absolutely key to the process.

Mr. Speaker, when I ran in 2001, I did not run for financial benefits. I can recall that when I was unsuccessful in my running in 2001 and when I was door-knocking again in 2004, an individual in Varsity Estates said: well, you were a teacher; I guess you're looking for a pay increase. I said at that time very honestly that I had no idea what the compensation was that MLAs received. That wasn't my focus. My focus was on trying to make up for the damage done to education and the cutbacks that began in 1993 and, as far as I'm concerned, have continued thereafter. I wanted to make a difference.

That said, Mr. Speaker, the salary I am currently in receipt of as an MLA is very close to twice the salary that I was making as a teacher when I retired from full-time teaching in 2004. I'm not going to compare the job I do now as a politician versus the job I did as a teacher. Both require considerable commitment. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon talked about being in public service for I believe it was in the area of 22 years, possibly 25. As of this September I'll have been in public service for 40 years, and I am very proud of that public service.

I wanted to contribute to this debate, Mr. Speaker, though I have previously announced that I plan to retire when the next election is called. While I would not be very subject to this bill should it go forward, I can understand the reasoning behind it. As I said, I don't believe it's something that can be solved by either a bill or a motion in this Assembly. I think it has to be solved, as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, by the formation of an independent committee.

Unfortunately, that independent committee, which was proposed towards a year ago, has still not been established. I would encourage all members of this House to encourage the government members, in particular our Premier, to have that committee established as a legacy act. From here on in MLAs would be free of any accusations of interference with their salaries, whether it be raises, whether it be in the form of committee salary, whether it be in the day-to-day working. My feeling is that as MLAs if we're to do the job right, I would hope that we're worth the money that the public has paid us and entrusted us to perform the duties. But it's the public that should determine our salary, not ourselves.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have an additional seven speakers. If we all go less than the 10 minutes, we'll get them all in.

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, then Strathmore-Brooks, then Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to share some thoughts on Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011, brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I'd like to thank the member for bringing forth this piece of legislation.

I'm sure all members of this House want their compensation to be appropriate. That being said, by focusing solely on transition allowances, I believe this bill misses the point. If the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere wished to engage in a discussion on the entirety of MLA compensation instead of only focusing on transition allowances, I think we'd have a more beneficial debate. Given that transition allowances are only part of the picture, I'm not convinced that we can definitively say whether or not they are too generous without looking at the other indemnities and allowances received.

Of course, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is part of the Members' Services Committee, and if he truly wants fair compensation for MLAs, he should bring these issues to Members' Services, where we can look at transition allowances while taking into account all of the other aspects of our compensation.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share some thoughts on this legislation. The fact is that when we discuss MLA compensation, we don't really have a lot to compare it to. Of course, we can compare it to the compensation received by members of the other provincial legislatures and of the federal government. The total number of elected officials serving in this country today is less than 2,000.

4:00

That being said, looking at private-sector compensation structures could allow us to step back and view our compensation in a larger context. Of course, many private-sector executives are compensated very well, and part of the allure of working for some private corporations is the possibility of large compensation and benefits packages along with bonuses.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that elected officials should be compensated like these executives, but I do think we can learn

from examining the structure of private-sector compensation agreements, which are generally carefully vetted to ensure that the pay is fair. All things considered, I think the concept of long-term value that's mentioned in the contract of many private-sector executives is applicable in our situation. As elected officials we're constantly working towards providing long-term value for taxpayer dollars. That's not to say that the private sector and the public sector should be treated the same when it comes to compensation, but I do believe that a comparison of the underlying structure is valid given the similarity of certain objectives.

Mr. Speaker, an interesting clause in the compensation structure of many large corporations is that severance pay is not always guaranteed. Should an executive do something unethical or irresponsible, there's often a mechanism by which that executive's severance pay can be avoided. I think that's another useful conversation that we could have if we were discussing compensation in its entirety.

I know that in Manitoba, for example, the transition allowance paid to a member is dependent on the manner in which they left office. For example, a member who leaves voluntarily prior to an election is not entitled to a transition allowance in most instances. Of course, there are exceptions if the leave is due to a medical reason or other circumstances. However, Manitoba and the rest of the provinces have a pension plan for MLAs, which can help them secure a reliable income after leaving office, which of course we do not have here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that we establish a similar policy here in Alberta. I'm just making the point that MLA compensation is multifaceted, and there are many angles to be considered when contemplating changes. If we're going to look at the structure of our severance benefits, then perhaps we could have the discussion about policies like they have in Manitoba. Ultimately, I think a serious discussion on transition allowances also obliges us to look at the requirements of this transition allowance.

Just to go back over some of the comments that we've heard here this afternoon, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere did talk about nobility. I just don't understand the connection between nobility and transition allowances, Mr. Speaker. Also, a reference to winning the lottery: I don't think that transition allowances really generally compare to any kind of lottery winnings. It's also an unfair comparison because it needs to be pointed out that these transition allowances are fully taxable, not like a lottery.

The Member for West Yellowhead mentioned that very few people do know what MLAs get paid, and I have to agree with that. Most people don't. I hear frequently, myself, about the big pension I'm going to collect after I leave here. There is no pension in this province. I've clarified that over and over.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out the wide variety of backgrounds that our members have, and we do. Looking around here, we have a forestry executive, a lawyer, real estate, another lawyer. We've got cattle ranchers.

Mr. Groeneveld: It's scary, isn't it?

Mr. Quest: It's quite frightening, yes, Member for Highwood.

It is a broad range, but I think that, in fairness, when you look at the total compensation that MLAs receive, and that's what we need to focus on, most of us – the Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed himself out as an exception – are being compensated on a range much lower than we were when we came here. A lot of us gave up very, very good careers to come here, and we may or may not be able to go back into those careers. If we do go back, we certainly will not be going back at the level we left them at.

Those are all things, I think, that we need to take into consideration before we consider even supporting this bill, so I will not be supporting this bill.

Just one comment also. I think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek mentioned that our Premier is the highest paid in Canada. I doubt that very much when you take into account the fact that our Premier along with the rest of us will not receive a pension when he leaves here.

I think it's important that we have regular reviews of MLA compensation. I think that's critical to make sure that there's fairness there. But I think any and every time we look at it, we need to look at total compensation packages, not picking out bits and pieces.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 202 because I believe that this is an important first step in reflecting today's economic reality. This is the same reality that Albertans are facing each and every day, and I believe Bill 202 is a reflection of leadership, leadership to go forward relative to the issue of what Albertans are facing today, our constituents, who are our bosses.

Over a year ago in this Assembly the Member for Lethbridge-East proposed relative to an independent committee, and I support the philosophy of an independent committee because I do believe, similarly to when I was mayor in Fort McMurray, that elected officials should not set their own salaries. However, as I reflect today, the bill that is put forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, which I commend, is an important first step. At this point there has been nothing as concrete as this bill that has been brought forward, which I think, again, is an important first step to reflect the current economic reality that our bosses, the people of Alberta, are facing.

It was once said that the ultimate measure of a person's character is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience but, rather, where they stand in times of challenge and controversy. Well, today's economy should reflect that it is not a time of comfort and convenience; rather, it is a time of economic challenge. Therefore, I believe that today is a defining moment, and I commend the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for recognizing, in terms of his consultation with Albertans based on what they are facing, that it should be reflected and mirrored in this very Assembly. So he chose to put forward this bill, which I one hundred and ten per cent support, and the reason why? It reflects the current economic reality of our bosses, our constituents. Nowhere does anyone receive what is presently in place. Consequently, I think somewhat in frustration because of nothing coming forward at this point, he has brought forward this Bill 202.

I think it's also equally important to recognize that today's economy should also mirror what is happening relative to the conditions that we have faced over the past period of time. It's hard for Albertans to believe that we're really right back where we started. The sacrifices made by all Albertans during the '90s now seem like a dream.

The government is about to run its fourth straight deficit. In no time at all our sustainability fund will be next to empty, and clearly, as you can see, the piggybank is going to be nothing more than a paperweight. It seems strange that the government has no memory of where we came from.

If I can reflect back on history just for a moment, I reflect back to the year 1993, when the then new leader and Premier – and a defining moment of that Premier was that he had to demonstrate to his bosses, the people of Alberta and members of the Progressive Conservative Party, that he was ready to lead. What did he do? He abolished pensions, and I believe that that decision, that political decision and the economic decision that that Premier made, Ralph Klein, back in 1993 was the correct decision in reflecting the pulse and the winds that were blowing in Alberta at that time. So here we are today, many years later, reflecting those same winds of change that are in the air.

I might add that during that time it came to a near defeat of the actual governing party of 25, almost 30 years, when Ralph Klein was almost defeated by the then leader of the Liberal Party, Laurence Decore, who was actually at the time considered more conservative than the Progressive Conservative leader. But the leader of the Progressive Conservatives did read the winds of change that were blowing.

I would strongly suggest to all members from all political parties: read and hear and feel the winds of change that Albertans are saying are blowing in Alberta. This Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, I believe, is reading those winds correctly. I believe he is demonstrating leadership, and he is taking an important first step.

4:10

The Member for West Yellowhead made reference to it being nothing more than a piecemeal bill, Bill 202. Nothing could be further from the truth because at least it is some form of action. This government had an opportunity over the last year to take action. They chose not to. In fact, they chose to increase behind closed doors the salary to its cabinet ministers almost 34 per cent. That is fundamentally wrong. It is fundamentally a total disconnect to the people of Alberta in terms of what they have been facing.

The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has a young family, four beautiful boys and his lovely wife. Only one is in school. Believe me, he is more concerned about the future than what has gone on in the past.

I think there is a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate leadership, to take the first concrete piece of action. Government and this Legislature do not have to be behind. It can actually lead, and leadership in this case would be by supporting Bill 202. I would encourage all members to do that because this today is the same defining moment that was being faced by the then-leader, Ralph Klein, in 1993.

You can come up with excuses. You can come up with how many e-mails you receive in a day. By the way, some of the members, the government whip and the Member for West Yellowhead, used the example of receiving 70 e-mails. Well, welcome to the club of receiving over double that. So if he thinks that's work, come on and join the Wildrose. No. Thanks. Don't come and join the Wildrose. We'll allow Albertans to decide. That clearly will show you what real work is.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will say that I believe everyone comes here – the reference from the other side talks about all the hard work. This Wildrose Party is not interested in hard work. We're interested in smart work, which includes hard work, and it reflects the values of all Albertans.

As we go forward, Mr. Speaker, clearly, today is a defining moment. This Assembly has a unique opportunity to vote in support of Bill 202 from the Member Airdrie-Chestermere. I support this bill that is being proposed. I also support the motion that was put forward by the member from Lethbridge last year,

but no action was taken. This is concrete action in a defining moment, and history will judge how you vote today. Do the right thing and reflect the values of Albertans by supporting this bill today, Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011. This is a sensitive topic for all MLAs to discuss and debate. After all, we ultimately have the ability to set our own compensation. As such, we must be especially prudent in making decisions about our pay.

Mr. Speaker, I don't necessarily disagree with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's assertion that transition allowance should be looked at. I agree with a number of others who have spoken in the House this afternoon with regard to this bill. My understanding of Albertans is that they have a very high expectation of the role of integrity and transparency in government, and they expect that of all of us. I appreciate the general, I think, acceptance of that across this House, the fact that we're all here to serve the best interests of our constituents, and we do that at considerable interruption to what we would otherwise do in our lives. For everyone that sits in this House or any Legislative Assembly across this country, the members do so in service to their province or to their country. That is certainly, in my opinion, a noble and high calling. I do have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm a Member of this Legislative Assembly with great honour with regard to the constituents of Strathmore-Brooks.

It's not my intention to speak to the specifics of this bill or to the specifics of remuneration for Members of this Legislative Assembly. I think that the importance of looking at remuneration for MLAs is always important, and probably one of the things that is most important is that it is reviewed on a periodic basis. I know that hasn't necessarily been the case in Alberta, that it is done on a matter of anniversary or anything like that, but it does get reviewed from time to time, and I think it's important that that be both transparent and a process that deals with the realities of the work that we do and reasonable to compare with other types of activity and work in the country. Clearly, the kind of work that we do in this Legislature is somewhat unique compared to the other jobs that many Albertans are involved in.

With regard to considering just the transition allowance by itself, I think that's an inappropriate way to deal with this issue. I believe that the whole matter of remuneration needs to be considered in the bigger picture, as a number of other people have suggested here, and to suggest that we narrow in on just this issue really oversimplifies the whole matter. This should be looked at, as I said, on a regular basis. I certainly would not have a problem with the concept of an outside review of salary and remuneration, but whatever the process, it needs to be a process that is transparent. I think that we have a good pattern in this House in that we have an all-party Members' Services Committee, that does deal with these types of issues, and that would be a more appropriate place to have this dealt with.

As I said, I haven't taken time to consider what the details of remuneration are for me or any of us or what the implications of that are on an ongoing basis, but I do agree that Albertans are favourable to that compensation package, the way that MLAs are compensated, to be fair and reasonable. It's important, in our me-

thod of dealing with this, that we recognize transparency and that we deal with it on a periodic basis but with due process. That's the part that is most interesting and most important to me, that there is a reasonable process to deal with that. There's no need to cover up any of the activity or the discussion that's held around matters of compensation, remuneration, or transition, but there's also no need to shine a light or to create undue attention on the matter.

Albertans really want this approach to be reasonable, and for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I support the good work that our Members' Services Committee has done in the past and the fact that it's an all-party committee. They have the ability to deal with this and all of the factors that can be considered around compensation and benefits, and that's the more appropriate place for this to be dealt with.

The compensation that MLAs receive, Mr. Speaker, and particularly the fact that our retirement benefits are front-loaded makes apples-to-apples comparison between other compensation structures difficult. To refer to other jurisdictions in the context of this is probably not appropriate whereas in the forum of the Members' Services Committee all of those variations can be considered more in detail.

As such, I don't think we can make a responsible decision on this particular policy change today as more time is needed to adequately weigh the costs and benefits of the proposal. Seeing that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere sits on the Members' Services Committee, it is probably best that he raises this issue there, where it can be given the time it deserves. I certainly respect the statements that have been made with regard to the concern for the bigger picture that is behind this motion.

Therefore, I'm not offering my support for this bill, and I would encourage other members to do the same.

That being said, I do thank the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for bringing this topic forward. I think the discussion we've had so far has been productive and useful, and time will tell with regard to the integrity of the whole process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the Minister of Environment, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere bringing forward this motion. However, in light of the fact that Motion 501, which was passed in the fall of 2010, specifically said an independent committee reporting back to this House, I really feel that the conversation and debate around this motion at this time are inappropriate.

I'm going to try to restrict my remarks to the essence of the intent of Motion 501 and, certainly, Bill 202 because I don't believe that actually speaking about MLA salaries or benefits is what we should be doing. We should not be setting our own salaries. That's exactly what ticks Albertans off the most, that we go in the backrooms and say: "Fine. I'll take this. I'll take that. I'm going to have a great transition allowance. I'm going to do this, that, and the other." That is what ticks Albertans off.

My vision, of course, is an independent committee that reports to this House. It actually should be binding, and it should never go near Members' Services, where, in fact, the MLAs could change it. So why bother? Why are we even thinking of an independent committee? That would cost us a fortune because these committees don't come cheap. Why would we waste that money if we're going to diddle with it in Members' Services? It has to be one way or the other. It's not boogie-boogie. It might be diddling there.

One of the examples, of course, that I always use is that, yes, we're very lucky, and we are indexed according to the average weekly earnings. Of course, my mantra always is: if it's good enough for us, then it certainly should be good enough for AISH recipients as well.

MLAs are required to vote. That is because it is part of the budget process. Those dollars come out of the budget. Yes, MLAs must vote on their own salaries, but that doesn't say that they should be setting their own salaries. The federal government at this point is looking at cutting sick days and pay. I think there are a lot of unhappy, probably, civil servants that don't want this kind of inconvenience, I suppose, for lack of anything else.

The Member for West Yellowhead explained what our job is. You know what? Yeah, we all work hard. We are on 24 hours a day. No, we can't go to the grocery store without listening to everyone's complaints, this, that, and another thing. You know what? That's our job. When we took this on, we knew how hard it was going to be, how much we were going to be paid, and if you didn't, then that's your own damn fault.

If you go to a job interview, one of the last questions that they'll ask you is: "Is there anything you need to know about our company? Is there anything you need to know about our expectations of you?" Those questions should have been answered before you ever ran for public office. Yes, I have always considered this a job. It's a job. It is nothing more than that. It's a job. Yes, we have tremendous responsibilities for our fellow citizens, but you know what? I know what it's like to work shift work, and I worked just as hard when I was working shift work as I am now. You work days, evenings, and nights. Your whole social life is destroyed. You go home, you try to get the kids off to school, you grab a few hours of sleep, you have dinner, and then you're back off to work again. Shift work is not easy, and a lot of our people in this province work shift work.

What about single mothers who have not a hope in Hades of probably ever getting a pension and are working two or three jobs? Don't tell me they don't work harder than us. It is a job. It is a part of our society, and all jobs are important. Long-distance truckers are away from their families. What about the guy that picks up our garbage? Is he as important as I am? In the major scheme of things he is. In the big picture everyone that has a job and contributes to our society is just as important as we are.

Yes, we're close to the top of the food chain. However, when I look at the salary – and I'm going to use the example of the president of Scotiabank, at \$17.5 million a year – we're not even close. We're not even in the picture in terms of being the top of the food chain. We are in this House, I think, very lucky to receive the compensation that we do. Do I think it's probably a little bit too generous? Yes, I do, but it's not up to me to decide that. It really should be somebody independent.

I don't have a pension. I've never had a pension, and I don't stand alone. I am probably in the majority in this province, people who do not have pensions, and it's particularly the women that I worry about. Often the pensions that their husbands get aren't translated over when they become widows, and we've got an awful lot of senior widows existing – they aren't living; they are only existing – trying to keep a roof over their head or, in fact, living in a very lonely little apartment.

We talk about getting the brightest and the best and that we have to pay them. No. You know what this job is. If you're the brightest and you're the best and you want to do public service, this is what happens. You work your tail off, and this is what you're paid.

One of the other examples that perhaps was used is that you really can't count on everything. I look at a number of people,

particularly those with disability pensions from Nortel. They have really been shafted. We will never be shafted by whatever compensation we have or whatever our transition allowance or whatever you want to call it because we get it from the taxpayers. We aren't counting on a company to be honest. This is, hopefully, an open and transparent process, where, in fact, we are pretty lucky to be able to be protected, and we are protected by the taxpayers.

So back to my original. I believe that Motion 501 is the one that was passed. I believe that it should be independent. It should report to this House. Yes, it should have some kind of a review process in it, but that's not up to us to decide. It should be an independent committee.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hesitant to get involved in this debate because, frankly, I'm not so sure that we should be having this debate. Some members have actually already pointed out that this is probably not the venue where this kind of a discussion should take place. Nevertheless, it is taking place. We are having that discussion, and I think it's appropriate that I, like any other member, participate in the discussion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some have suggested that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has brought this particular bill forward for political reasons. I won't go so far as to suggest that. I will give him the benefit of the doubt, and I will suggest that he has the best of intentions in this bill. He truly is trying to bring forward something that is going to improve the situation and bring better governance to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, on that account I would suggest that he is mistaken. This is not going to result in an improvement, and many members have done a very good job of enunciating the reason why. We have a process in this Legislature. We have a motion, that has already been passed by this Legislature, that recognizes that it is difficult in the extreme for politicians to be engaged in setting their own compensation. But that set aside, it's even more difficult and more inappropriate to try and piecemeal some kind of a compensation package together, and that's exactly what this bill does. This bill takes one tiny piece of the compensation out of context and then begins to make changes to an overall compensation package without taking into account the bigger picture.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I think that bigger picture is exactly what the Member for Lethbridge-East was suggesting should be done in bringing the motion forward that was supported by members in this Assembly, that there needs to be an independent review, and it needs to be all encompassing. It can't focus just on one component of compensation because, as some members have very rightly pointed out, most other Legislatures that are sometimes used in comparison have one form of pension or another, and those pensions are paid out over an extended period of time and, at the end of the day, have value to members.

This particular Assembly made a decision some time ago that we would not have pensions. Instead, there is a process in place that provides for a transition allowance. Some members have greater benefit from that transition allowance than others. Like the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek I was elected in '93 as well, and I also would see a significant amount of transition allowance that

would be paid to me under the current system. But, as she pointed out, that is something that is part of my financial planning, something that I have been able to put into some kind of a plan to determine how I am going to provide for me and my well-being into the years that other people would perhaps have had the opportunity to participate in some kind of a pension plan. I have considered that as part of the overall compensation package.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's what we are asking and what the Legislative Assembly has suggested needs to be done in agreeing to an independent review. Now, I understand that the Members' Services Committee has begun the process to begin that independent review but is awaiting names to be submitted by members of the opposition to move that process forward. I would at this point urge all members of the Assembly not to support the bill that's before us, to defeat this bill, but at the same time urge the Members' Services Committee to move forward with the implementation of the motion that was passed, I think unanimously, by this House last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. At 4:50 I shall interrupt to allow the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to conclude the debate.

The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it an honour to rise and to speak to Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011. I am speaking in favour of this, of course. I find it interesting the number of government members who have gotten up and spoken that it isn't appropriate to talk about this here in this Assembly, yet they find it perfectly appropriate after an election to go behind closed doors and give themselves a 34 per cent raise. So I find that almost comical, to think that they would come up with this idea of not appropriate.

I also find it quite entertaining that even yourself and the Members' Services Committee read into the *Hansard* saying that you've received no instruction. Bill 501 was passed over a year ago.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. Do not bring the Speaker of this Legislative Assembly into this debate. Do not. There is great risk for you.

Proceed.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. In Members' Services Committee it has been brought up and discussed, but there was no, to my knowledge and understanding, actual committee struck to do anything. So we'll continue to go forward with that. The government members continue to say that all of this is happening in the Members' Services Committee, that that's the appropriate place to bring it up. No. I think this is the appropriate place to bring it up, where we need to talk about it and the fact that it needs to be in front of an independent committee.

A number of members have gotten up from the government side saying: well, we need more time. How is it that we need more time to strike this independent committee and enact it? They've had over a year, and they've failed to do anything on this. Again, it's very disappointing to listen to those speakers get up and say: oh, we need more time to address this.

This government has failed to act on the promise to strike that committee. They've failed to address the problem; therefore, it's starting to boil over again. Again, it's interesting that they say now: oh, this three months for every year is good; it's appropriate.

Why is it that back in '92, when they struck the pension plan, they didn't find it appropriate then when they were looking at it?

It's also interesting to me that if you go to the library, there are still currently, Mr. Speaker, over 20 former MLAs that served prior to 1992 that are receiving over \$50,000 a year in pension. It clearly got out of hand. That's why former Premier Klein said that we need to strike the pension plan. It's just not appropriate. It's interesting that when you look at the list of the total people, there's a yearly expense to the Alberta taxpayers of \$3.8 million for those who are still collecting the old pension plan. Again, that varies from a very meagre amount of \$1,596 per year up to a top payment of \$109,000 a year on the old pension plan. Are we going to learn from that, or do we have to go through the cycle and go past the point of no return almost before we address this?

It's interesting to me that one of the first things this government did after they won the election was give itself a raise. I would want to say that if this House was in fact to set its own wage, I would find it – and I've spoken on this before – far more appropriate that that should be the last act that we would do going out into an election.

It's always amazing to me the talk about how humble we as MLAs are when all of a sudden we're faced with going to the electorate and saying that we want to be re-elected. Why not start at that point and say, "Oh, you know, we deserve a huge raise of 34 per cent," and then go out campaigning on it. It wouldn't happen. There would be retribution to be paid on that. Again, it's comical to say, "Oh, we can look after it ourselves," but it's always after the election, and they hope to have three and a half, four years before they have to be accountable.

It's interesting when you talk to people – and, again, I agree with the committee report from B.C. – that most people do not know what MLAs earn. I have to confess that when I ran the first time, it wasn't something that was a concern to me. I gave up my personal businesses and whatnot to get involved because I was frustrated with the direction government was going, and it wasn't until after I got elected that I found out what I was getting paid. I also found out the huge discrepancy between opposition members and government members. It was quite astounding to me to see how much they received in pay. It was interesting to see those old committees that they had that often hadn't met for three years, and then they were getting paid \$20,000 a year to chair committees that weren't even meeting. Again, when that was brought to light, those committees were struck, and a new system was set up.

We need to realize and look at the history here of how things changed from one month to two months to then three months per year served and that transition. Why is it that we start off humble, and then all of a sudden think that, oh, we're the most important? As my colleague mentioned, are they PCs or PPs? Are they, you know, Progressive Conservatives, or are they politicians putting themselves on pedestals? That's the question. Are we going to put ourselves on a pedestal? There's no question that the work that we do here, the legislation that we pass, has a major impact on the people of Alberta. I would venture to say that we have the biggest impact on their daily lives: the services that we provide, the schools, the hospitals, the roads. That is what we do here in the Legislature. We prepare for the future in looking at what services need to be there.

4:40

Again, it's offensive to the Alberta taxpayers to see MLAs set their own wage. Once again, it's been over a year. Motion 501 was passed unanimously, yet this government has failed to move on there. Like I say, the number of MLAs that say that we need more time, I would argue that what we need more time for is as-

essment on what the value is of CO₂ storage, what we need is more time to assess the need for \$15 billion in power transmission lines, but we don't need more time to strike an independent committee to decide the future of MLAs' pay. It just doesn't need to happen.

Again, where are we on the pedestal? When I listen to some of the government MLAs, you'd think that we were on the top of the food chain because of our position. I ask the question: is there anything more honourable than serving our country in the armed services? Where do they fit in? They put their lives on the line, not just their lives on hold or a business on hold for a year or four years or 12 years. They actually go out there, and they put their lives on the line. So I just don't think it's appropriate for us to think that: "Oh, this is a great service. We should get compensated above the average of anyone else because, oh, we're government MLAs." It's so critical that we need an independent commission to do the research, to put out the reasons, as were read from B.C. – this is why they're paying these individuals this amount of money – and keeping it at arm's length so it's not quite so self-serving.

Why is Bill 202 so needed? It's because we are running major deficits at this time, the fourth year that we are running a deficit here in the province. We have a problem. We have a problem with the payment to the huge number of civil servants out there working, and we need to set the example. It's critical that we set the example. This government set a bad example by getting elected last time and giving themselves a major boost and then going and having to renegotiate contracts with unions and the teachers and the firefighters, just all the way along, and saying: well, you should only have a 2 or 3 per cent increase, but it's okay for us to have a 34 per cent increase.

The purpose of this bill is to send a message today, a clear message to say that we get it. Times are tough again. We don't want to go back to the '92, when we had billions and billions of dollars of actual deficit. We have a cash deficit in our operating. We don't want to go in debt to the people of Alberta, which is where we're running in a big hurry. It is the time to do this. Today's a good day to pass that, send a wonderful message to the taxpayers of Alberta. There will not be a better time. Every day delayed will increase the pain that we're going to have to pay and to look into the future, so we need to do it now. There's no reason to say: "Well, let's wait for a commission to come together. Strike it. We'll wait another three months, six months, a year." Today is the time to say yes to Bill 202.

I hope you'll reconsider and vote to send a loud message to the people of Alberta that we understand these are tough times, and we'll start here by cutting our pension plan, which is too lucrative.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak on Bill 202, an act that is geared towards revising downwards quite substantially the severance package currently received by MLAs in this House, and I'm pleased to indicate that it is the intention of the NDP caucus to vote in favour of this piece of legislation.

I want to say that, you know, there was some need for consideration in that regard because there is certainly one element of this bill that I have a concern about in that it talks about referring the matter back to the Members' Services Committee rather than having the matter addressed by an independent commission to establish what is a fair salary and a fair rate of compensation for MLAs. I don't believe that MLAs should be setting their own

salaries. I just simply don't believe that it passes the smell test for most Albertans. It may be a function of parliamentary tradition, but I just don't think it's fair. I don't think industry should be monitoring itself when it's exploiting the environment, and I don't think MLAs should be setting their own salaries.

Notwithstanding that, here we have an opportunity to vote on this bill. The reason I will vote in favour of this bill and our caucus supports this bill is that to do otherwise is to then have us fall back to the status quo, where nothing is happening, and meanwhile we continue to receive these severance allowances. The question is, you know: are the severance allowances fair? Well, maybe they are; maybe they aren't. But here's the thing. As legislators I believe we need to be fair to the taxpayers and the citizens of this province, who elected us, and here's what we have done in the last two years in this Assembly to the taxpayers and the citizens of this province, who have elected us. We have frozen the minimum wage. We have frozen AISH payments. We have failed to revise the labour code to promote unionization, which is the most effective method of improving the rate of pay of most working people. We have stood in the way of pension improvement, genuine pension improvement, for all Canadians across this country. We have led the way in impeding low- and middle-income Albertans and Canadians from receiving a fair pension.

That's what's come out of this Legislature, so I cannot in good conscience be part of this Assembly, even though I didn't support those decisions, and quietly accept our gracious and generous package while at the same time we are doing the kinds of things to average working Alberta families that have happened as a result of decisions taken by the majority of members of this Assembly over the course of the last two years. When given the opportunity to act, to make a decision that would bring about some fairness, it's hard to avoid doing that.

Now, the history of the severance package is interesting. Many people have commented on the fact that it was brought in in 2001. I'd simply like to remind members of this House that at that time the NDP Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was the only member to vote against the package being put in place. Taking this position at this point would be consistent with a 10-year position that has been advocated by the Alberta NDP caucus.

As well, in 2009 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood also brought a motion to the Members' Services Committee to have this matter addressed by an independent group of people, to have the question of our salaries addressed. That motion was voted down by the majority of members on the Members' Services Committee. [interjection] Sorry; I can't quite hear. There's a member talking, but I can't quite hear what he's saying.

Many people have commented on whether or not we should be talking about simply one piece of the MLA compensation package and that somehow by talking about one piece, we're being unwise and thoughtless and reckless and not true to the taxpayers and whatever the other arguments are. The fact of the matter is that three years ago there was a decision made by the Members' Services Committee to change the process for committee compensation such that many of us received roughly 20 to 35 per cent increases in our salary. It varied from member to member somewhat. Of course, that was one piece of it. I mean, that was committee compensation, and that was one piece. There are other pieces. There's salary. There's the severance allowance. There's the RRSP. There are all different pieces. But that was a clear example of us dealing with one piece, so I have some trouble with everybody now suggesting that dealing with one piece would be irresponsible.

I'm also concerned about the argument that this severance package – and I've sort of touched on this already – is designed to

deal with the fact that MLAs don't receive pensions. You know, I happen to think it would be great for MLAs to have pensions, perhaps not the rich pension that was eliminated in the early '90s but some form of pension. I'd like an opportunity to maybe buy into a pension, something like that. I'm not suggesting we should have anything like what was happening in the past, but I'd love an opportunity to take my savings and try to buy into a pension because I've never had the opportunity to do that since I moved here from B.C.

That's fine, but the fact of the matter is – and one member talked about how pensions are very important, and they are very important. But as I've said before, this is a government that is actively working to limit people's access to pensions across this country. It just really doesn't sit well with me that we're going to defend this package for ourselves as a quasi-reasonable quid pro quo for having no pension and that implicit in that decision is the notion that pensions are valuable but at the same time work as hard as this government is working to stop regular Albertan and Canadian families from having access to genuine, poverty-eliminating pensions in their future. It just truly doesn't make sense to me.

4:50

I had a couple of more points here, and I'm just trying to remember what they were. I may have covered them.

It is with those points in mind that we will vote for this bill. I believe it's an important issue to address. It's been raised in a variety of contexts a variety of different times by different folks. Although some folks, for instance in the Official Opposition caucus, are suggesting they don't want to vote for it because of the piecemeal element of it or because it would put the matter back to the Members' Services Committee, at the end of the day I think that we need to do something. I think that by failing to vote for it, we support the status quo, and I just simply don't believe that in the current context that is a fair decision to make on behalf of regular Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. You've got about one minute.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for noting that I do only have one minute to speak. I can't say everything I wanted to say, but I'll say some things that I believe are important.

I believe that we do have a very important job as MLAs, and I think that we have a big responsibility in making sure that we have the proper compensation, not too big and not too small but just right. I do also believe that our current approach to MLA compensation is already a cost-efficient and responsible method. Before that minute is up, I would just like to point out that if we were in Nova Scotia, we would be able to have pension compensation and benefits of \$100,000 per year after our service, but we're not in Nova Scotia. We have a more reasonable way of having compensation after we serve.

Mr Speaker, I would just like to add that I did support Motion 501 by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I look forward to having that go forward. I would also like to thank the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for his responsible actions in bringing this very important issue forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 16 members have been able to participate this afternoon.

I'll now call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to close the debate.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members who participated in the debate. Obviously, I'm somewhat disappointed with how it would seem that most of the members are going to be voting against this bill. I would commend the hon. members for participating in the debate and specifically my Wildrose colleagues and, of course, the hon. member from the NDP caucus for explaining why it is so important that we show fiscal leadership as we move forward and that this is a good start.

There have been some comments made that do need to be corrected regarding this committee. As we all know, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East had a motion passed saying that we should have an independent committee look at legislative compensation and benefits. That was over a year ago. There has been some suggestion in here that the process for that committee has just been wending its way through the Members' Services Committee and so forth, and that is just simply not the case. It is just simply not true.

In the Members' Services Committee prior to the last meeting of the Members' Services Committee there became some uncertainty as to what the status of this committee was at that current time. We had the Member for West Yellowhead say, you know, that we're just waiting on the opposition members to give us some names for this independent committee. I'm sure I can speak on behalf of the NDP caucus and the Wildrose caucus when I say: absolutely, we have not received anything, any formal request, any request at all. We don't even know what we would want. We don't know the parameters. We don't have any terms of reference whatsoever from the government side on this matter. To say that we've had that request is absolute malarkey.

I go specifically to the *Hansard* notes from two meetings ago. When this came up, the Speaker frankly and truthfully spoke exactly on what the status was of this committee at that time. He says:

This is the Legislative Assembly, and this is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. We are not the government of Alberta.

The motion urged the government to establish a committee.

The government of Alberta is, essentially, the cabinet.

My understanding from previous comments made in this particular meeting by [an hon. member] is that some discussion was held between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, and they were holding discussions. Then somebody asked [the Member for West Yellowhead]: well, does that mean other people can provide some names as well? I do believe that's where [the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere] got that information. It was very clear. I have received no indication from anyone in the government that we are to be looking at this matter. This is not at this point in time a matter of the Members' Services Committee.

I'm a little ambivalent about this. I indicated before that we always do our assessments. We always get everything up to date in terms of comparatives across the country, but we've done nothing further. I'm just pending, awaiting somebody to tell me that this is what we should be doing. Then I'll put it together. That's where we're at.

So it's very clear – very clear – from the *Hansard*, and we've received no correspondence from the government, from the Members' Services Committee, from anybody regarding such an independent committee. When we receive a letter from the government or from the Members' Services Committee, from whomever, on how they would like us to participate, we will gladly participate at that point. But what really has happened here,

clearly, is that the government is embarrassed that they're voting against this bill, and they're looking to blame someone other than themselves for voting against this bill. The fact of the matter is that we have done nothing on this issue over this particular Legislature the entire time we've been here. Nothing.

Well, we have done something. We've seen salaries go up 34 per cent, and that of course was done behind closed doors, in cabinet. On top of that, because of that 34 per cent increase, transition allowances will of course go through the roof because they're based on the top three years of average salary. That's the record of this government, to raise their salaries indiscriminately.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|---------|--------|
| Anderson | Forsyth | Hinman |
| Boutilier | Hehr | Notley |

5:10

Against the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| Allred | Griffiths | Ouellette |
| Amery | Groeneveld | Pastoor |
| Brown | Hayden | Quest |
| Calahasen | Horne | Renner |
| Campbell | Jablonski | Rogers |
| Chase | Klimchuk | Sandhu |
| DeLong | Leskiw | Snelgrove |
| Denis | Lindsay | Vandermeer |
| Doerksen | Mitzel | Webber |
| Drysdale | Oberle | Xiao |
| Fritz | Olson | |

Totals: For – 6 Against – 32

[Motion for second reading of Bill 202 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-East, we've dealt with the tablings situation, right? No liquor bottles in the Assembly. Please proceed.

Mr. Amery: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not tabling right now.

Alcohol Warning Labels

502. Mr. Amery moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation to make warning labels mandatory on all alcohol sold at retail outlets in the province.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 502. I'm proposing this motion because I feel that the potential adverse effects of excess alcohol consumption make it necessary to label these products effectively. Perhaps in the future I will also wish to introduce a motion that seeks to address a larger and more serious issue at hand, impaired driving.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Motion 502 urges the government “to introduce legislation to make warning labels mandatory on all alcohol sold at retail outlets in the province.” The institution of alcohol labelling in and of itself is not the end goal of this motion. The primary intention of Motion 502 is to be a necessary first step to raise awareness of prevention of impaired driving. Another purpose is to make citizens aware of the adverse effects of alcohol consumption, especially when consumed in excess or carelessly.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 502 also intends to inform citizens who are in the highest risk group such as minors and pregnant women of the harmful effects that even a little alcohol consumption can have. If consumed in a responsible manner, alcohol poses a much lesser threat than if it is consumed inappropriately. Labelling alcohol would act as an educational tool for those who choose to consume it. If consumers are already aware of the adverse effects, the warning labels will act as a visual reminder.

Mr. Speaker, this labelling initiative seeks to deter at-risk consumers like those who pose a threat by driving impaired as well as those who consume to excess or irresponsibly. The proposed warning messages on the labels should warn of the harmful effects alcohol can have on its user and have a visibility profile similar to those on tobacco products. These warning messages would intend to be precise and consistent while having the visibility to attract the consumer’s attention.

The health-related effects of excessive or irresponsible alcohol consumption can be rather serious. I think that goes without saying. In addition, Mr. Speaker, alcohol is dangerous if consumed while or before driving or taking certain medications and carries a strong risk of dependence.

Mr. Speaker, a number of countries around the world have moved to legislate warning labels on alcohol containers in their jurisdictions. Most of these jurisdictions do so with the intention of educating the public on specific health effects. Among these is the United States, which has had government-mandated warning labels in place since 1989.

The Yukon territory and Northwest Territories are currently the only two Canadian jurisdictions to mandate such labels. The labels in the Yukon are fluorescent pink or orange and are designed specifically to attract attention. Introduced due to public concerns about FAS, these labels have warnings that alert individuals that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects. A survey conducted three years ago, after the introduction of the warning labels, indicated more than 90 per cent of Yukon women were aware of the FAS risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Perhaps somewhat like the intent of the alcohol warning labels in other jurisdictions, Motion 502 seeks to initially address a much bigger issue at hand. That issue is impaired driving and the deadly effects that accompany it. While deaths involving impaired drivers have decreased in recent years according to MADD Canada statistics – Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have Denise Dubyk, MADD Canada’s national president, with us here today watching this debate from the members’ gallery – our province still sees among the highest impaired driving deaths per capita in the country. The culture around the consumption of alcohol must change in order to further decrease these statistics.

With this in mind, MADD Canada has outlined a number of recommendations to reduce the number of impaired driving cases. Among these is introducing a mandatory seven-day administrative vehicle impoundment program for suspended drivers. Another recommendation involves making alcohol ignition interlocks mandatory for all impaired driving offenders. What this would specifically do is prevent a driver from starting his or her vehicle if the device detects a preset level of alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, realizing the benefit of alcohol warning labels is merely a first step and a catalyst to providing change to the bigger issue at stake, the issue of impaired driving. The implementation of these labels would not come at an overt cost. Motion 502 would require all retail alcohol distributors to put warning labels directly on the product, and the cost of the labels would be assumed by the distributor. When you consider that the distributors must already label the products, adding one more label should not greatly add to the cost. In fact, one Alberta distributor already supports placing warning labels on alcohol products. Ravinder Minhas, owner of the Alberta-based Mountain Crest Brewing Company, already places warning labels on his products through his own initiative. Mr. Minhas does so, as he said, because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 502 does not intend to harm or otherwise intrude on those who consume alcohol responsibly. Likewise, Motion 502 does not intend to harm businesses or liquor distributors. There are many Albertans who drink alcohol in a moderate or otherwise responsible fashion. This would be especially vital to help educate both minors and pregnant women that any alcohol consumption can be seriously hazardous to their health.

Mr. Speaker, a Canadian community health survey published by AADAC in 2005 indicated that 9.4 per cent of Alberta women reported consuming alcohol during their last pregnancy. When you consider the fact that women who drink alcohol during pregnancy place themselves at an extremely high risk of having a child with FAS, zero alcohol consumption is clearly what is best for pregnant women. The sad fact is that some women are not even aware of this. A warning label could help educate these soon-to-be mothers on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, when looking at statistics related to the question of whether or not warning labels really work, one need look no further than a recent study of Ontario smokers. The survey demonstrated that 91 per cent recalled having read the warning labels and demonstrated good knowledge of the content. This same survey found the respondents reported having a higher intention to quit upon seeing the often graphic warnings. What these findings indicate is that warning labels and the multifaceted messages that they can include can be effective.

5:20

With Motion 502 we could take a positive step towards raising awareness of the adverse effects of excessive or irresponsible alcohol consumption. This could at the very least help to reduce the number of FAS births by better educating soon-to-be mothers.

Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to propose anything too dramatic or too unrealistic, nor do I wish to have this harm business or liquor distributors. I believe Motion 502 to be a very moderate and realistic step towards better educating the Alberta public and raising awareness of alcohol misuse and the dangers of impaired driving.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would invite all my colleagues to join in the discussion surrounding Motion 502, and I hope they vote in favour of this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular Motion 502, for which I am very thankful to the hon. Member for Calgary-East, follows very much along the line of a former motion put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, which called for cigarettes and cigarette advertising, basically, to be no longer visible. That’s why, for example, you no longer find pharmacies selling smokes and why, when you go into garages, cigarettes, et cetera, have to be behind closed cupboards so as not to potentially

appeal to individuals and to encourage them to develop better habits.

In terms of developing good habits, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure whether I was a fast learner or a slow learner, but it basically took me my first year of university to realize that smoking wasn't meant for me although I thought having a pipe and a goatee along with my blazer emblazoned with the University of Calgary colours would make me absolutely appealing to all women who trotted around the campus. But I found, after continuously sucking on this pipe and inhaling for a period of about two and a half hours, when I opened the door to my car and fell out, that this was not a good habit to pick.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that I learned the alcohol lesson very early on, in my first year of university, without compromising my safety or that of my date, but I must admit that my father's Ford Galaxie 500 was worse for wear than the driver who left it positioned poorly on an island. I was fortunate. I learned my lesson early on, and no one's health or safety was compromised by my individual actions.

Going forward, I am very concerned, as the hon. Member for Calgary-East is, about the impact of alcohol, particularly behind the wheel, where the greatest number of accidents and fatalities are caused. The stupidity of the driver and the stupidity of the passengers that potentially get in the car with that driver: we're of the assumption that at least if they're of a legal driving age, they potentially know better. The unborn child has no such say; therefore, encouraging not only women but men to realize the harmful effects to a child of the consumption of alcohol would go greatly towards the elimination of fetal alcohol syndrome, which can at best be managed, but so much better would the world be if it were absolutely eliminated.

One of the things that I think most people, especially of my mature vintage, would notice is shows like *Mad Men*, where the smoking in the workplace is so obvious, and they almost shine a spotlight on the pregnant women smoking their cigarettes or consuming alcohol. We say to ourselves: "Well, that was then. How could they not have known? What were they thinking?" That was the circumstance that people of my vintage grew up with in the late '50s and early '60s, yet when we look at that program, it seems so obviously wrong to the majority of individuals who went through that time period.

Anything we can do such as the labelling on alcohol, as proposed in Motion 502 by the hon. Member for Calgary-East, and getting that message out can only do good. It certainly cannot do any harm. I know as a schoolteacher who spent a great deal of my time in junior high the risks that junior high students would take. Given the opportunity to get behind a wheel, as they grew older, I've lost children, students, to death behind an automobile wheel. I've also had my grade 9 students participate in AADAC programming, where they realize that alcohol and driving or drugs and driving don't mix. So if this message gets out to even one mother or a responsible father, who is responsible for not only his child's well-being but his family's well-being, if this message saves one child, then this Motion 502 is valuable.

I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing it forward, and I would hope that more young people learn their life lessons before the age of 19, which it took me to realize going forward. Thank you.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share some of my comments on Motion 502, but before I do that, I

would first like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this idea forward to the Legislature today. I believe this idea should generate some spirited debate.

This motion proposes to urge the government to make warning labels mandatory on all alcohol sold in the province. These labels would function in a similar way to the warnings we see on tobacco products, informing consumers about the potential negative consequences of alcohol use.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that responsible alcohol use is acceptable within our society, and I believe that an informed adult should be able to consume alcohol provided that he or she do so in a manner that does not harm themselves or others, as in cases of alcohol abuse and drunk driving.

With this, however, I also agree that people should be informed about the potential negative consequences of alcohol use. As it stands now in Alberta, we have several programs designed to inform people about the dangers of alcohol use and abuse as well as several programs designed to help people who have succumbed to these afflictions.

5:30

Programs and organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Mothers Against Drunk Driving are all designed to stop or treat alcohol misuse. In addition, the government regularly issues warnings against drinking and driving, drinking while pregnant, or drinking while under the effects of drugs. Mr. Speaker, the issue with these programs and warning labels is not that they don't work; rather, the issue is cost. As large as our advertising programs may be, they will never reach every consumer of alcohol, and as effective as our treatment options are, the cost of preventing someone from becoming alcohol dependent will always be less than treatment. As such is the belief, the strength of this motion rests on its cost-effectiveness.

Motion 502 would essentially require that all retail distributors of alcohol be required to put warning labels directly on the product in question. The cost of these labels would be borne by the retail provider but would not greatly add to their cost of production because they already put labels on their products. The cost of developing the specific labels would be negligible and could be borne by either the government or by the alcohol industry. In fact, other jurisdictions in Canada already have this requirement, so the cost of developing these labels could be next to nothing.

Mr. Speaker, with the cost of this labelling program well established, the question then becomes determining whether or not these labels are effective. Looking at other jurisdictions around the world, it is apparent that programs like the one proposed by Motion 502 are on the rise. For example, in 1993 only nine countries had alcohol warning labels, but by 2006 this number had grown to 16, including nations like the United States, Finland, and Brazil.

Closer to home the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories have enacted measures similar to the ones proposed by Motion 502. In fact, according to a survey conducted in the Yukon, three years of labelling was required. Over 90 per cent of the drinking population were aware of the risks associated with drinking while pregnant. This survey did not suggest, however, that people stopped drinking while pregnant as a result of this label.

The end result, in my mind, is that we have a proposal that may or may not be effective, but it is one that has grown in popularity around the world. Perhaps the most important consideration is cost. The cost to implement this program, I would say, would be minimal for both government and industry. Even if the program is not completely effective, we may in the end get good value for our money.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will conclude my comments on this motion except to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for introducing this idea. I believe that a thorough debate of this issue is in the interest of all Albertans. I'd like to thank all the members who are going to speak about this issue. I look forward to the remainder of this debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak to Motion 502, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-East. I appreciate this motion very much and congratulate him for bringing it to this floor for us to debate. I do note that I will be speaking in favour of this motion as I believe it is an idea that is, in my view, long overdue and can have some benefits for many people in our society, actually the entire society if you look at it like that.

Let's face it. Alcohol is a legally sold product that governments earn revenues on. It has been thus, and it shall be thus for a long time to come. But with that comes, in my view, some responsibility by government to provide some sort of warning to individuals out there who are about to use and consume this product. Now, it's very easy for us to sort of rationalize and say: "Everyone knows that binge drinking is bad for you. Everyone knows that pregnant women shouldn't drink. Everyone knows this, that, and the other thing." But the fact is that I'm not so sure everyone does know. Okay? The simple fact of the matter is that if they do know and they're willfully blind to it, I don't think that is really one of those things that is good either.

The government being there to remind them of the fact that this could be destroying their lives and, in fact, destroying the lives of others is one of those things that government has to do. I think that these labels will serve that purpose. If a person, say, who's between 18 and 30 is consuming far too much alcohol and maybe this helps him or her realize by the end of their 30s that, well, this can't continue, and this is one of those small things that seeing that label for 12 years leads him or her to a better decision, well, that's one of those things. Or if a woman who may have been a heavy user of alcohol becomes pregnant, well, then she changes her ways as a result of seeing that for the last seven years.

Also, for our beginning drinkers. We heard the MLA for Calgary-Varsity say that many people when they're younger tend to imbibe a little more heavily than when they're older. I might have been guilty of that a time or two myself, Mr. Speaker. Nevertheless, maybe having that would have given me some cause for recognition that an extended stay on this would lead to health implications. You can see there are a variety of upside benefits for this, you know.

Always the argument is what the cost is. In my view, the cost to industry for switching labels over would be a one-time expense, possibly no more, maybe a touch more. It would provide people with information on an ongoing basis on an important issue. Frankly, from what I've seen from the statistics, Albertans for whatever reason consume more alcohol per capita than, I believe, any other province, possibly because we're younger, possibly for a whole host of whatever reasons. That has ramifications for our different government-run programs: the education system, the health care system.

Statistics in Alberta on FAS – that's fetal alcohol syndrome – for people being born in this province are, again, startlingly high when you look at comparisons around Canada. What are the reasons? Who knows? But there are definitely concerns around

alcohol. Our drinking and driving rates are higher than generally other provinces around Canada. A whole host of reasons. We're not saying right, wrong, or otherwise.

What we're saying is that the government is involved in the provision of alcohol. It is legal for us to do so, and it's legal for our citizens to consume it. Let's fire a warning on there. Let's make sure that no one can say: well, nobody told me. If by chance they honestly were not of the view that this could happen, well, now they're assuming more personal responsibility sent their way and some possibility for some help along the way.

Those are my points. I think it's a great initiative, and I again thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward. I urge all members to support it. Thank you.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the MLA for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to join the debate today on Motion 502, brought by the Member for Calgary-East. I will keep my comments brief, but I first would like to apologize to this House and also to the Member for Calgary-East because it was me who, in fact, gave him the bottle that he referred to earlier, that I found when I was on vacation in Hawaii. I saw on the bottom of the bottle the warnings, and I knew that we were having this one. So if there is any scorn, it comes to me and not to the Member for Calgary-East.

This is a motion, Mr. Speaker. It's a nonbinding, symbolic vote we have. We debate it for about an hour. It's not a bill like the previous bill that we were discussing. It's just an indication. It's just a debate going forward. I think that if this were something that we would want going forward as an actual government policy through regulation or through legislation – be it a private member's bill or a government bill – there are some things, in fact, that we just would need to go and ask ourselves.

Now, Denise sitting up there has visited me before, talking about the many dangers of drinking and driving. When I went to university – and yes, I did have a few bubbly pops in university as well – we knew it was not socially acceptable to drink and drive. I think that MADD Canada, SADD, and other people as well have done many, many good things in making that less socially acceptable. Nonetheless, Alberta does have a very high drinking and driving rate. Drinking and driving or fetal alcohol syndrome or anything negative from alcohol, where you have one too many: one too many is more than is acceptable.

I do want to ask a couple of questions here as well, and perhaps the Member for Calgary-East can address this in his closing remarks. Before we institute any regulation – we have many regulations in this province – we need to always do a cost-benefit analysis, Mr. Speaker. We put in regulations, and sometimes they don't have exact costs associated with them as far as outlay of government funds, but at the same time they can impose a negative economic externality upon others. That's not a bad thing. We have a lot of good safety regulations in this province. Some say we need more; some say we need less. Regardless, we need to ask ourselves: is the negative externality that that may impose upon consumers, producers, distributors, in fact, actually worth it? I don't know the answer to that question. We need to go and look and learn from other jurisdictions.

I mentioned that I was in Hawaii when I saw the bottle itself. The question, again, that I would ask is: have the warning labels on the bottles made a reduction outside of the margin of error on the rate of things like fetal alcohol syndrome or the rates of drinking and driving? If it has, then it's worth going through. If it has

not, well, maybe we should look at other ways that might be more cost-effective to the consumer before moving forward. I don't know how much this is going to cost, even if it does actually cost. They say, though, that producers will pay for it. Well, of course, that's passed on to the consumer as well.

The other thing is that a lot of alcohol is imported. I know some people here like to drink Alberta Springs. I don't. But most of the alcohol is imported to this province. We'd have to go and see how that would affect the importing of what is, in fact, a legal product.

Mr. Speaker, I favour a lot of individual responsibility. I want to applaud Ravinder Minhas at Mountain Crest Brewing for having darn good labels on this. I think it's good leadership they are taking, to go and put this on on a voluntary basis. But if this were to go in a bill, I would just want to see the hard evidence. I think the public would respect that as well as to where it, in fact, is going.

I want to again commend the Member for Calgary-East for actually bringing this up because this is a worthwhile debate to be having, the fact that we're drawing attention to this. The more attention that you can draw to the negative effects of drinking and driving or things like fetal alcohol syndrome, I think, the better, Mr. Speaker. So he should be commended for that.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-East, but I'd like to congratulate him on actually having drawn a low number for the motion so that, in fact, he could bring this forward.

In my mind this is a no-brainer, to use the colloquialism of the kids of today. It really is a no-brainer. Drinking and driving has not been beaten either here or in many other places. However, in Europe there really is zero tolerance. We don't have zero tolerance here. If you get caught drinking and driving in Europe, your car is gone; you walk home. If you're in Europe, you'll also notice that people congregate in different ways. There are often little pubs, for lack of a better word, in many of the small communities, and because people's houses are smaller or they live in apartments, often the partying is done in these small pubs. It's just a given. You can always pick who that designated driver is. It's not even up for discussion. Someone is the designated driver.

One of the other things that I think about putting a label on is that maybe it won't be understood the first time. Maybe it's just: oh, well, there's something else. But repeat, repeat, repeat. After a while someone who is thinking will know what that label means. They may not have to read it; they'll know if it's red, this is what it means or if it's pink or neon or whatever it is. It will be repeated.

I think one of the worst side effects of alcohol, particularly for our women who are pregnant – look at our jails. Look at the number of people that are in our jails that suffer from mental health issues. Many, many, many of them have fetal alcohol syndrome, which is something that we didn't know about or how to actually evaluate it. This information is coming forward all the time.

I would like to see the kids of today educated in grade 5 to know and start talking about the issue of: do not drink if you're going to get pregnant. I know that there are a lot of careless pregnancies that happen out there, but in this day and age of reliable birth control there is absolutely no reason for young girls to get pregnant accidentally or whatever excuse they use at the time. If they start in grade 5, they'll know simply: you've decided to have your baby; do not drink. More often than not the damage is done in the first trimester, and a lot these young girls don't even know they're pregnant. It's a huge, huge issue. The kids of today,

through the education in the school, know what green means. They know: don't smoke. They know: don't eat junk. They know: eat your veggies. They know, "Wear a helmet," even if this is a law at this point. They know these things. It's through the education system that they know it. I would like to see part of the education around these.

Also, they would learn in school that this red label, however they're going to do it, is a label that's warning you to use alcohol very, very responsibly. There's nothing wrong with having wine, whatever. I think probably we all learned. I think that first-year university is when many young people learn some of the things that they can't handle and shouldn't be doing. However, it's fun at the time, and away they go. It's all part of the growing up process.

Fetal alcohol is a huge, huge issue. This is something that cannot be reversed, but with proper supervision victims can be helped to be functional in society. Many, many, many of these young people will never be able to handle a job, so we are looking at gigantic social and health care costs in the future. Anything that can be like a flashing sign, a flashing warning sign, I think is good, so I would certainly take pride in being able to support this. At least it will push the conversation forward. As it's been pointed out, it's not a bill, but it does bring the conversation forward. It does make people think.

Again, thank you to the Member for Calgary-East. This is an exceptionally important discussion that must happen.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

5:50

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today and share some comments on Motion 502, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. This motion urges the government to consider legislation whereby alcoholic beverages would have mandatory warning labels.

Mr. Speaker, alcohol abuse is a problem that affects many Albertans. A Canadian community health survey taken in 2008 shows that one-quarter of males and 10 per cent of females in Canada are classified as heavy drinkers. More problematic, however, is the number of heavy drinkers in younger demographics. For example, the same surveys showed that 47 per cent of males aged 18 to 24 are classified as heavy drinkers. There is no simple solution to reducing the incidence of heavy drinking. After all, adults have the right to consume alcohol as long as it is done in a safe manner. I believe this motion's idea may help change certain problematic drinking behaviours.

There is an obvious parallel between the legislation this motion proposes and legislation which requires tobacco products to contain warning labels, often of a graphic nature. In fact, Canada was the first country to enact legislation to require such labels, and now most western countries require them as well. While definite conclusions have not been established, the general consensus is that the effectiveness of these labels depends largely on the size and whether or not they include pictures. Given this research I believe that the efficacy of warning labels on alcoholic beverages would also depend on the size and type of warning.

I think the fact that warning labels on certain consumer products are useful in curbing their use is a bit surprising. After all, one would think that an individual's decision to smoke or drink is made before they see the product. However, repeated exposure to such warning labels may actually get the message across that consuming this product is dangerous.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that including such labels may educate some people who may be unaware of some of the hazards associated with alcohol consumption. For example, some individuals may be unaware of the fact that alcohol consumption can cause fetal alcohol syndrome. Furthermore, even those that may be aware of the link between alcohol consumption during pregnancy and fetal alcohol syndrome may not be aware of the fact that there are no accepted safe levels for consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. So I think that a warning label could be an effective tool that reminds Albertans of the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that warning labels on food products are generally considered to be the federal government's jurisdiction. While this does not mean our government is absolved of any responsibility with respect to this issue, it does mean that there may be other ways to achieve the intended result. Rather than proposing legislation, for example, perhaps we could work with other provinces and the federal government to encourage such legislation federally.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks. I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing forward this idea. I think he has shown very good leadership on moving this idea forward. I'd like to mention that in Alberta there are more than 100 Albertans who die in drinking and driving related accidents. For that one reason alone I think that we should support this motion. I think that this discussion addresses a public health concern, and further consideration of the matter could be useful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak about Motion 502, which proposes to mandate labels on alcoholic beverage containers, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Do I get to speak until 5 to 6?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 8(3) there are 55 minutes allowed for motions and five minutes for closing. We started at 5:11, which means that 55 minutes would be 6:06. We stop at 6 o'clock. Therefore, it will carry over until next week. Then we will debate for six minutes on Motion 502, and then we're done, and there will be no other motion next week. There can only be one motion per week.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak until 5 to 6 in hopes that Moe will be able to speak to finally end it.

I just wanted to say that I'm in favour of this and that we do have a choice here. Maybe we can even alternate here in terms of what actual problems with alcohol we most want to address with this. Different countries do it in different ways. The one thing that I doubt will work is in terms of heavy drinking. Heavy drinkers have much bigger problems than a little bit of text will address. I'm hoping that FAS is something that we can address very well and, of course, the drinking and driving.

In hopes that the mover of this motion could possibly finish up with his final words, I will sit down. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and join the debate, if only for a few minutes. As the

minister responsible for the AGLC, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, I thought I should rise and give a couple of comments and my thoughts. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods' assertion that food labelling and product labelling is often the purview of the federal government. It could be argued that that would be the case here although we could, I suppose, do something provincially.

I have to say that I'm really torn, Mr. Speaker, and I'm kind of on the fence. I think I might lean slightly at the moment towards support but only because it's a motion that's not binding on the government. I do think it's an issue that we need to consider.

First of all, as the minister responsible for the AGLC, I need to stress that alcohol sales in this province are a business. They are not the purview of the government. We're talking about private businesspeople that manufacture, wholesale, and then retail alcohol. It's a government-regulated business. The government is involved in the movement, the shipping, of alcoholic products to liquor stores, but they are private businesses. Any time that we put costs anywhere in that system, they only wind up in one place. It doesn't matter if we add costs to our own, to the manufacturers', or to the retailers', the cost winds up in the consumer's product. Whether we have to raise taxes to pay for it or the prices have to go up, the consumer pays for all of it.

I need to point out that the cost would be significant. You're talking about thousands of products and thousands of different types of drinking bottles. Next time you walk into a liquor store, have a look at the front counter. There are hundreds of tiny shot glasses and odd-shaped little drink containers, and all of them would require a label. Then some of the products arrive pre-wrapped, you know, those Christmas gift packages and stuff. Those are shipped from some other place. So there are a few problems, and the costs are not insignificant. I'm a little tempted by the argument, though.

Mr. Speaker, I never bring a minister to my constituency without taking them to Sonja Schmidt's house in High Level. Her entire house except for her master bedroom is devoted to the care of FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, children. She and her late husband, George, did that for years and years. They adopted something like 30 kids and cared for hundreds in their house. She does that solely on contract to one of the First Nations up there.

When I'm finished there, I take them over to 10005 House, which is a shelter for people that are severely in need of emergency shelter and who otherwise, quite simply, would freeze to death in High Level.

I'm very moved by the impact of alcohol on the lives of those people, as all the ministers always are. Most of them, quite frankly, are reduced to tears by the end of that tour. I'm also mindful of the fact that none of those people would be helped by a warning label on a bottle. I don't believe that for a second. Much as the Member for Calgary-East talked about the warning labels on cigarettes, the people that were aware of the warning label, what it said and everything else, there's some irony in the fact that they were smoking while they were telling you that they knew what was on the warning label. I think the case is similar with alcohol.

Impaired driving is absolutely an issue, and I thank the great people of MADD for the work that they do. But sometimes I think we're at the point where we really need to do something on the enforcement end, on the other end of that. The education end is covered in a lot of places.

I'm kind of torn. I'm basically prepared to support this motion because it furthers the discussion. It's nonbinding at this point. But I can't go beyond that without some solid evidence of what good there is in this: what it's going to accomplish, how effective

the warning labels are going to be, and who's really going to listen to them. The problems that I see out there I don't think are going to be solved by a warning label.

I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this up. It's a discussion that always has to happen. I thank MADD for the wonderful work that they do. I honestly do think we have to do something in this area. I'll support this, but beyond that we need a thorough discussion with more statistics before we move on.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is 6 o'clock, and according to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

There are 10 minutes left for debate on this motion. That will happen next week.

The policy field committee will reconvene tonight at 6:30 for consideration of the main estimates of Service Alberta. This meeting will be video streamed.

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

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