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The 27th Legislature
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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you 52 bright young students from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie and Ellerslie Campus elementary and junior high school. They are here with their teachers to enjoy a week at the Legislature. Joining them today are their teachers Mark Campeau, Blair Faulkner, and Tom Klimaszewski. At this time I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly leaders from Alberta's francophone community who participated this morning in a ceremony in the Legislature rotunda as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture and history.

The executives are from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA. The ACFA is the provincial organization representing all francophones. We also have members from the Campus Saint-Jean choir. Forty choristers from the Chorale Saint-Jean lent their amazing voices this morning to the ceremony in the rotunda. The group has been invited to tour France this summer, and in 2012 they will be hosting more than 1,000 choristers right here in Edmonton for the Choralies Internationales, the most important international French-language choir competition.

The Alberta government is proud of its strong relations with the francophone community in making sure French-speaking Albertans have access to the services and resources they need. We also appreciate the good work that they do in representing the province across Canada and around the world.

I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them. Dolorèse Nolette, Denis Perreux, Laurier Fagnan, Casey Edmunds, Marcelline Forestier, and Denis Fortin. Also joining them on this special day is a member of my staff, M. Denis Tardif, executive director of the Francophone Secretariat. These individuals are in the public gallery today. Please join me in offering them the warmest welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to introduce two gentlemen who are very familiar to members of this House, the chairman of the Energy Resources Conservation Board, Mr. Dan McFadyen, and his sidekick, Rich Jones. I'd ask them to stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't get as many people up from Calgary as I would like. In fact, I'm thinking of adding something to my newsletter, inviting more of my constituents up here. But today I do have a constituent who is here. He works with the Calgary Zoo, as you know the second largest zoo in Canada. He works on the whooping crane, building the population of the whooping crane. If everyone could please join me in welcoming Mr. Dwight Knapik. If you could rise, Dwight.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the real privileges of being the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is that I get to be the MLA for the University of Alberta, and I'm honoured today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some special guests from the university. They represent one of that institution's most notable organizations. It's known as WISEST, which stands for Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology. I will be rising later today to make a statement in recognition of International Women's Day and the important role that WISEST plays, but for now let me make the introductions: Denise Hemmings, who is chair of WISEST; Grace Ennis, who is the WISEST co-ordinator; Kerry Humphrey, who is the WISEST assistant co-ordinator; Jen Duffy, who is the WISEST outreach co-ordinator; and George Pavlich, who is associate vice-president of research at the University of Alberta. Please stand, and please give them a warm welcome.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, today is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, and there are two sets of introductions that I would like to do. The first is a representative from an organization called Equal Voice, which is a not-for-profit devoted to the still-bold idea that we need to get more women elected to every level of government in Canada. That is Sandra Ngo. Sandra, please rise. She's a third-year nutrition and food science student at the U of A. She found out through another member at the U of A, Meagan McLavish, who was not able to join us. I note in the paper today that Equal Voice is sponsoring a speaker in Ottawa for a conference, Leveraging Women's Leadership for the 21st Century: Changing the Game. That speaker says: today it's understood that if we only use men, we lose a lot of potential and opportunities. Thank you very much, Sandra, for joining us today and representing Equal Voice. Please join me in welcoming her.

My second introduction is of two members of a very long-standing organization that has been very supportive of women and women's status in our community. Jacquie Foord is the fairly recent chief executive officer of the YWCA here in Edmonton. With her is Amber Niemeier, who is the communicating and market manager. I'll have them rise. As you know, the YW has been working for women in Canada and Alberta for many, many, many years. Please join me in welcoming these two representatives here today.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to introduce to you a couple of my friends who are members of the francophone community. One is originally from the

Haitian community, and the other one is originally from the Congo. Mr. Amson Saintimé is the president of the Haitian community services centre, and Mr. Sugar-Eric Yumba is the president of the SOS Amitié friend association. I would like our colleagues to give them warm applause from this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have an introduction on behalf of your colleague.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guests from the Sexual Assault Voices of Edmonton, also known as SAVE. SAVE is a coalition of sexual assault centres, educational organizations, community members, and the police. It works to change societal attitudes about sexual assault through awareness-raising campaigns that place responsibility on the perpetrators of sexual assault and challenge rape myths and victim blaming. I would ask our guests to rise as I read their names so that they can receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly. They are Dorian Smith, Laura Collison, Lise Gotell, Monique Méthot, Pragma Sharma, and Cindy Davies. Welcome. Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

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

1:40 International Women's Day

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and privileged to rise today and recognize March 8 as International Women's Day. This is a very special day as it is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. Today we celebrate, recognize, and honour the many extraordinary achievements of women in Alberta, Canada, and around the world. Our province proudly acknowledges this day and reaffirms our commitment to the equality, freedom, and advancement of women.

Alberta's Famous Five – Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, and Henrietta Muir Edwards – helped pave the way, Mr. Speaker, for future generations of women in Alberta and across Canada. My colleagues and I appreciate the great contribution that all women have made to make this day possible.

Canada's theme is Girls' Rights Matter, which focuses on the importance of equality and access to opportunity for all girls and women. We know that a young woman who enjoys equality has a greater likelihood of being self-confident and aware of her own potential and of being empowered to access the education, training, and career opportunities that will contribute to her success in life. We also know, Mr. Speaker, that women still have many difficult challenges, which is why Alberta continues to take action on women's issues.

Women have told us that better access to quality, affordable child care would make a real difference for their families. Our Premier heard this request, and over the past three years we have created more than 18,000 new child care spaces. This means that women and their families now have access to more than 90,000 spaces across the province, and we also have child care subsidies to help lower income women with the cost of quality care for their children.

We are working hard to help prevent family violence.

Our Persons Case scholarship is awarded each year to students whose studies contribute to the advancement of women.

You can see, Mr. Speaker, that incredible progress has been made, but we know that more still needs to be done to address challenges such as poverty and inequality. To help address these challenges, we work nationally with the federal-provincial-territorial groups on women's issues for aboriginal women, economic equality, and human trafficking.

Today across Alberta, Mr. Speaker, many communities are celebrating the achievements of women, and they're shining their light on their efforts as they encourage the next generation to follow in their footsteps.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask that all members of the Assembly join me in honouring the contributions, the talents, the leadership of women across the province as they are a true inspiration to all of us.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A hundred years ago, as the world struggled to come to terms with rapid population growth and technological progress, socialist parties in Europe and the Americas spearheaded an international movement to force recognition of the inherent right of women to vote, work, and be free of gender-based discrimination. Several years later Albertans elected Louise McKinney to our Legislature, the first woman to achieve this feat across what was then the British Empire. More milestones followed here in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world as women asserted their rights throughout the course of the 20th century.

Now recognized and supported by the United Nations, International Women's Day has grown in importance year by year with thousands of events held worldwide annually.

We have had, however briefly, a woman Prime Minister. We've had female Premiers, Lieutenant Governors, Governors General. Women lawyers, judges, businesswomen, and administrators are now, if not common, at least present in greater numbers than ever before. We haven't had any women Premiers in Alberta yet, but that could very easily change sometime in the next few months.

There has been definite progress, a century's worth, but the journey to true equality for women continues. Women still earn less than men for doing the same work. Women are still under-represented in politics and far less likely to serve as CEOs. Worldwide, women do two-thirds of all human work yet earn only 10 per cent of the total income and own 1 per cent of the world's property. Women are far more likely than men to be the victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. The sexual behaviour of women is judged by a far different and hypocritical standard than that of men. Women continue to be objectified and stereotyped across the media. Positive portrayals of women are still far outnumbered by these regressive stereotypes. Even in the developed economies women are still risking their careers when they become pregnant. The list of barriers and struggles goes on, and that's why International Women's Day is as much a call for continued action as a celebration.

I firmly believe that when it comes to these issues, the instigators of change are middle-aged women and young people, the middle-aged because we've seen injustice and stupidity, lived through it, and felt the effects, and the young because they're still full of idealism and a powerful desire to change the world. The middle-aged women effect change with their experience and money; the young provide energy and time.

Today I salute all women who fight daily to ensure their inherent rights to respect and equal treatment are recognized. Thank you.

The Speaker: I suspect that requests will be made to have a representative of the third and the fourth parties participate in this, so I'll ask the question. We'll need unanimous consent, and the question will be in the negative form. Does anybody oppose seeing two additional speakers participate? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. The first Women's Day was observed in 1909, during a time of great expansion in the industrialized world. In Alberta we have a strong tradition of female empowerment. In 1927 Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Nellie McClung convinced Prime Minister Mackenzie King to ask the Canadian Supreme Court to clarify the word "persons" under the British North America Act of 1867. When the Canadian court confirmed that persons were men and only men, these women persuaded the government of Canada to appeal to the Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council. There they won their case, and on October 18, 1929, Canadian women were legally called persons. These pioneering women came to be known as the Famous Five and stand as role models to this day for women young and old. Now equal rights are enshrined in the 1982 Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, you have noted that Christy Clark was recently elected as leader of the B.C. Liberal Party and will soon be the Premier of B.C. It's clear now that women can do whatever they set out to do, whether it's raising children, driving a tractor-trailer, or becoming the next Premier in this province.

I'd like to end with a quote. Golda Meir, the first female Prime Minister of Israel, said: "It's no accident many accuse me of conducting public affairs with my heart instead of my head. Well, what if I do? Those who don't know how to weep with their whole heart don't know how to laugh either."

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One hundred years ago thousands of women marched in the streets of New York to call for better pay, decent hours of work, and voting rights. Women's Day began in a very practical way, with recognition of the unfairness that marked the lives of women.

International Women's Day is rooted in working for economic, political, and social justice for women, the full and equitable citizenship of women. We need this clear perspective on the day in 2011 as well because full equality still needs to be something we struggle for, something that is not easily delivered.

Today in Edmonton women are marking this day at NorQuest College to draw attention to the importance of equal access to education and training as the pathway to decent work for women. Later this month the Network for the Advancement of African-Canadian Women will mark the day to draw our attention to the many achievements of African-Canadian women that result in better lives for all of us. The NDP opposition is thankful for the work of organizations that take the full participation of women seriously and call our attention to what this means.

Alberta has the biggest wage gap between women and men in Canada, and it is getting worse. Two-thirds of low-wage workers over the age of 25 in Alberta are women. Women depending on EI are increasing while the numbers for men are falling. Amongst our seniors poverty is a more serious challenge for women, yet this government resists pension reform that would offer women a bet-

ter chance of economic security in their senior years. During the working years women are challenged by Alberta's inadequate number of regulated, affordable child care spaces. Recent additions do not meet the demand, and on a per capita basis Alberta is still near the very bottom of spending on child care.

1:50

Looking around this Assembly, we also make note on this day that there is still much to be done to ensure that women are able to actively participate in the political arena in numbers equal to that of men.

Ultimately it is very important to remember and celebrate the successes of the courageous and uncompromising women of the past. However, we do a disservice to their efforts if we fail to acknowledge that true equality for women remains elusive. As such, this day is a good one, in which all members of this Assembly can commit themselves to working for the change needed to obtain true equality amongst all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before we move on to the question period, I do want to recognize one woman in this Assembly, and that's the Member for Calgary-Elbow. Happy birthday plus one day.

Oral Question Period

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

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government continues to duck, dive, and stonewall by not calling for an independent investigation into compromised emergency room care for 322 patients. The chairman of the Health Quality Council of Alberta is saying that the government's internal review lacks independence. We applaud the Health Quality Council's effort to restore public confidence in health care even as these Tories mismanage health and continue to fail Albertans. To the minister: will the government do the right thing and support the Health Quality Council request to expand their mandate, allow them to investigate . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council does a tremendous amount of good work in this province. They do quality assurance reviews when they're asked to by either me as minister or by the Alberta Health Services folks. Under the regulation that they exist, they have a very clear mandate, and to my knowledge they're accomplishing it very, very well.

Dr. Swann: I did say duck, dive, and deny, didn't I, Mr. Speaker?

Will the government finally do the right thing and allow the Health Quality Council to launch an investigation into the 322 cases that you've had on your government books since 2008?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's put this into context. On Thanksgiving Day weekend last year I was written a letter by the chair or the president of the emergency doctors, and along with that he cited 322 cases. His request at the time was: please use these 322 incidents to help address the backlogs in emergency departments. That was the primary purpose of that list of 322 cases. We immediately got Alberta Health Services' senior team clinicians onto that. They are looking at that review right now. But where do you start that review when you don't have names? You

have to verify 322 people. It's just about impossible, but they are doing the best they can as fast as they can.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear this government isn't into building trust in our health care system. How can Albertans, including the health care workers in this system, have any trust in this government when since 2008 you have failed to investigate 322 concrete cases of malpractice?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty serious allegation right there. I think he'd better be prepared to say that where it counts, out there. We've already had one doctor alleging this; now we have another one. Step up to the plate, step outside, and say that if that's what you're going to say. Otherwise, what conclusion can we come to? If you know something, say it.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Workplace Safety

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An explosion at a natural gas well southwest of Edson has left 12 workers injured. The Alberta Liberals have been advocating for years for the government to ramp up work site safety enforcement, but this government is only belatedly taking our advice. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: if the minister now believes we need to boost the number of safety inspectors significantly to deal with the economic upturn, isn't he conceding that this government severely understaffed and underfunded worker safety programs during the past boom?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there is a prime example of someone blowing out a candle just to prove that it's dark. A 52 per cent increase in occupational health and safety officers over the last year, new office in Fort McMurray, enhanced enforcement of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, enhancement of education, training for our staff, full adherence to the Auditor General's report, full adherence to some of the criticism levied against this department in the media: how much more proof does this man need to show him that this government is committed to occupational health and safety?

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to see is that we don't have four sets of industrial gas- and oil-related accidents within a two-month period going forward.

Haste makes waste, Mr. Minister, and it leads to errors and injuries but not in the case of hiring occupational safety. Given that the number of safety inspectors stayed practically constant throughout the recession, was this government's hiring freeze behind the failure to increase safety enforcement before the incidents at Horizon earlier this year and now in Edson?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, occupational health and safety is a co-operation between workers, employers, and this government. All initiatives, including hiring the additional occupational health and safety officers, are paid for by the employers of Alberta through the Workers' Compensation Board; hence, hiring freezes or any budgetary restraints of this government had nothing to do with this, and this member knows that very well.

Mr. Chase: Workmen's compensation is a sad commentary, Mr. Speaker.

Given that an enhanced inspection program uncovered gross safety violations in the construction industry last December, will

the minister order a similar program for the oil and gas sector after these four incidents within a two-month period?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what this member is also not willing to tell you is the fact that the gas and oil sector, particularly in northern Alberta, actually has some of the fewest incidences of occupational health and safety violations and incidents in Alberta. The fact of the matter is that we have taken, also as part of our enforcement, focused inspections of businesses. We're focusing on forklifts right now. We will be looking at the residential construction industry. We will be looking at young workers. Commitment is showing. This member just chooses to ignore it.

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

Gender Equality

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two things, I believe, are critical to women's equal participation in the life of this province, economic equality and representational equality. To the President of the Treasury Board. Today is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. Let's do a report card. With fewer than 10 exceptions why is it that none of the rest of the government agencies, boards, and commissions have enough women appointed to achieve the critical mass necessary for equitable representation?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that I would be the last one to suggest that there was anything about the total respect and equality in my life for women. But I've got to say this: these boards and agencies that are mandated to run the different responsibilities they have have a job to do first. While we all need to work in our lives and in government to provide opportunities for women to achieve those goals, it can't come at the expense of the skills that are in that board. Why there are not as many women I can't tell. Possibly there weren't as many applications, but the fact is that this government is very committed to equality for women.

Ms Blakeman: With respect, that is utter nonsense.

To the same minister: given that this government has contracted delivery of many services to not-for-profits, which have predominantly female employees receiving lower pay and fewer benefits than in the public sector, how much has the government closed that wage gap? By how many cents per hour?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the wage gap is and how much it has closed or not closed.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you are the minister in charge of the Treasury Board. Let me try one more time. To the same minister: given that the poorest families are those headed by single-parent females and that although 70 per cent of them are working, they still have just one-eighth of the assets the average Canadian family enjoys, what has this government done to reduce this gap in the last five years?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that when we hire, we don't hire based on whether they're a man or a woman. We hire on credentials, and our paycheques don't know where they're going. We do not discriminate at any level in this government. To suggest that somehow Alberta is different from the rest of world, where across the world we recognize that there's a long way to go so that women do achieve final equality, to try and push

out some of the good work that corporate human resources have done in departments in this government is detestable.

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

2:00 Emergency Medical Services
(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The verdict is in. Clearly, there is enough evidence to go forward with an independent review by the Health Quality Council, as reported today by the highly respected Dr. Lorne Tyrrell, chair of the council. Will the minister of health today commit to all Albertans and this Assembly to launch an investigation right here, right now, today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's been any evidence or proof provided yet to substantiate the allegations that were made in this House last week. However, I am prepared to consider any type of appropriate action at the appropriate time once we have the appropriate information in front of us. So far we don't.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given the response, the non-answer by the minister, Dr. Lorne Tyrrell, a highly respected medical doctor, who is the chair of the Health Quality Council, said that there should be an investigation. Will this minister for this Assembly and for all Albertans do the right thing and launch an investigation today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I have said already that I don't have the basis upon which to launch such a request to the Health Quality Council. What we do have is a review of the 322 cases, which the member tabled essentially yesterday, which were brought to our attention last fall for the purpose of helping out emergency rooms. We've looked into that, and we've taken concrete action. We've opened more beds, we've got new protocols, and we have more people on staff. That's what we're doing. We're looking after protecting this system and improving it, and that's very positive news for Albertans to hear.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, one more time: will this minister respect Dr. Lorne Tyrrell on his advice to launch an investigation for the 322 that he's referenced in the ER crisis? To protect all Albertans, will you launch an investigation today? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no, not at this time because there is nothing upon which to base such a launching. You have 322 cases. There are no names attached there. There are dates that would have to be verified; there are locations that have to be verified; there are other physicians that would have to be contacted. That's what the senior clinicians are doing today and have been doing for the past four months. It's complicated because usually a health quality assurance . . .

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

Villa Caritas Geriatric Mental Health Facility

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier opened the geriatric psychiatric unit at Villa Caritas. Amidst all the fine words and self-congratulations the Premier failed to mention the recent suicide of a patient at Villa Caritas. The government was warned that Villa Caritas was designed as a long-term care facility and lacks many essential features necessary

to ensure the safety of psychiatric patients. Now a patient is dead. To the health minister: will the minister admit that this government's negligence and incompetence have resulted in psychiatric patients being placed in unsafe conditions, which led to the death of a patient?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, how unfortunate to characterize a question that way. Our hearts go out collectively and directly to the family of the person who suffered this particular demise.

I can assure you, having been at Villa Caritas on a few occasions now as well as at Alberta Hospital as well as at the location in Ponoka, that outstanding care is provided for people with mental health difficulties in this province, including the circumstance referred to by this member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, well, given that a cursory inspection would show that the showers and bathrooms are potential places for suicide, that there are blind spots in the buildings, the light fixtures are potentially dangerous, and there's insufficient staff and given that upgrades to Villa Caritas were inadequate to ensure the safety of psychiatric patients and given that the geriatric unit at Alberta Hospital was properly designed for seniors with serious mental illnesses, why did this minister proceed to transfer patients, knowing they were being put at risk?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no patients were put at risk, and no patients ever will be knowingly put at risk. Let's get serious here. We have a state-of-the-art facility with hugely improved facilities and amenities. If you'd just go over there, hon. member, and walk through, take a look at the increased space that they have, take a look at the integrated services that they now enjoy, take a look at the extremely capable staff that are providing those services, you'll come to the same conclusion we all have, that it's an outstanding facility doing outstanding work for some very vulnerable people who need it.

Mr. Mason: Then how, Mr. Minister, did a patient manage to commit suicide within days of moving into this safe facility?

Given this government's record of mismanagement, that includes unnecessary deaths in ERs and on surgery wait-lists, and given the tragic and preventable death at Villa Caritas, will the health minister admit that his government's abysmal mismanagement of the health care system has led to numerous deaths, unnecessary deaths, of Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, there is a lot that can be done to help protect the safety of the individuals in question. That's one reason why we upped the dollar amount for the building of that facility to 51 and a half million dollars, to ensure that the best protections possible could be there, to ensure that the state-of-the-art equipment necessary to help these people would be there, to ensure the best possible environment for them to live out their years. That's what we've done, and that's what we're going to continue to do: help those people, not attack them, not accuse them.

**Speaker's Ruling
Decorum**

The Speaker: I would think that when an hon. member raises a question about the suicide of an individual and an hon. minister was giving a response, most members would listen attentively instead of acting out. For what reason is beyond me.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have to go back to the health minister and ask him again. In all seriousness, the confidence in our health care system is at an all-time low. We know that two-thirds of Albertans have said that they don't believe the government is managing it appropriately. Health professionals in their survey indicated nonconfidence in the management of the health system. Returning these 322 cases to the Health Quality Council would help to restore trust in the health care system. Will you do that, sir?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I will be speaking with individuals involved in this review very soon. If there are some appropriate actions that they feel are warranted or that I feel are warranted, I can assure this member and I can assure all Albertans that those steps will be taken.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's almost unprecedented that the head of the Health Quality Council, Dr. Lorne Tyrrell, a well-respected physician in the province, has requested this. Is there something that you don't trust about his judgment on this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is getting his information. I have not had a request of that nature put to me by Dr. Tyrrell. I know Dr. Tyrrell very well; I respect him highly. If he has a request like that for me, then I will certainly sit down and consider it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the minister: does he deny that his department has been aware of these 322 cases since 2008?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe those cases were referred to Alberta Health Services. I think they are the ones who are the custodians of the 322 incidents. As I've indicated before, a typical health quality assurance review deals with one case, maybe two. That's typical. In this instance there's just not enough information upon which to accelerate that review. It's taking its own course. It's being done by doctors not unlike the doctor who is questioning me right now. It's being done in a very thorough fashion. So let's allow that process to move along, and if they find something, they will let us know.

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

Securities Regulation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has been challenging the federal government's move to establish a single national securities regulator to the point where it took its case to the Alberta Court of Appeal in January. This morning the court released its opinion, and it agreed that securities regulation is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. What are the repercussions regarding Alberta's future fight against a federal securities regulator? Where does it go from here?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are happy that the Alberta Court of Appeal has interpreted and adjudicated basically along the same lines that our argument was based on, that securities regulation is a provincial

matter constitutionally. They reinforced that. This isn't the end of the fight, but it's always helpful to have a level of court at that stage that supports your argument totally.

2:10

Mr. Rodney: My next question is to the same minister. Perhaps not surprisingly, Alberta has been accused by some as fighting with the feds for no good reason in this case. What's the minister's rationale for these efforts in this particular case at this particular time?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I think that on the securities regulator there is a very good reason. Maybe more importantly, Mr. Speaker, there is a matter of principle involved, that constitutionally we have rights and responsibilities in our province, and we need to make sure that we challenge these on an ongoing basis. The simple fact around the securities regulator is that most of the other provinces support the initiative. So I'm not trying to pick a fight with anybody. Well, maybe with some people but certainly not with the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Canadian provinces support the system which is already in place, so can the minister please clarify why he feels there's such a need for Alberta and other provinces to continue to push back regarding the latest federal proposal?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's because history has shown us through these very difficult times in a recession that the system we have works. The American system falls under a single regulator. It was a disaster. We've got a national-in-scale system that the provinces administer. You know, to use the old saying, if it's not broken, don't fix it. That's where we are with Alberta. It's our responsibility, and we're doing a darn good job of implementing it.

Political Contributions by Municipal Officials

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, a freedom of information request revealed that seven elected representatives from the county of Barrhead's council, their spouses, and two staff members attended a 2009 fundraising event for the Barrhead PC association at a cost of \$720. I'm certain that it was a wonderful event. Now, I wouldn't be asking about this except that the elected officials' tickets were paid for by the county of Barrhead or, in other words, their taxpayers, which is a clear violation of the Election Act. To the Minister of Justice: will the minister notify both Elections Alberta and the PC Party of this incident so that monies can be returned to these taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to be corrected, but I believe the money has already been returned.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank you for that honest and clear answer, but if I gave you some documents, could you further investigate? And if you find out that this matter has been taken care of, I would be happy, and we'll move on from there.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. I'll certainly undertake to look at whatever documents the hon. member wants to pass along, and we'll act accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. I'll leave it there.

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

Heartland Electricity Transmission Project

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the proposed routes for the heartland transmission line runs through the east TUC and through my constituency. Many of my constituents are very concerned about this 500-kV line being so close in proximity to homes and a nearby school and are strongly advocating putting this line underground. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. I understand that the cost of underground is generally higher, but what's being done to ensure that an accurate estimate for at least a portion of this line being buried will be considered?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note in the Assembly that the Alberta Utilities Commission, which is an independent, quasi-judicial body, will begin its hearing into this particular line in just over a month. We need to ensure that no comments are made that are going to be perceived as trying to influence that decision. But there have been a number of studies done over the past year, and I'm sure that those will be presented during the hearing. It will be up to the commission to make its decision relative to the siting of the line.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what can you tell my constituents to reassure them that environmental and health concerns will be thoroughly considered during that process?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, Health Canada assesses and monitors health and safety risks that are associated with radiation-emitting devices – that includes power lines, cellular telephones – and ensures that Canadians are protected under our laws. I know that on the website of Health Canada it states that there is research that has shown that these electronic currents are not associated with any known health risks. That being said, the commission is obligated during the hearing process that if there's any evidence to the contrary that may be presented . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: what assurances can the minister give that all possible routes and technologies will be given fair consideration? Minister, I've heard today that the TFO crews may already be working in the TUC.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be clear on the very last comment made by the member. There is some soil testing going on both in this particular route and the alternate route. That's part of the pre-engineering work that's needed to ensure that they have adequate information relative to costing and should in no way be construed that the project will be approved. In fact, the AUC, just to be clear, can either approve the application, approve it with conditions, or deny it. So let's let the hearing take place, and the decision will be rendered.

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

Twinning of Highway 63

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort McMurray is booming again, and highway 63 is as dangerous as ever. Twinning is essential. We have been at it since 2007 and are not expected to be completed before 2015. That is over eight years later. There is no excuse for twinning this highway in small, time-wasting increments instead of one dedicated project. To the Minister of Transportation: why has the minister chosen the most delayed method of completing this project?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing that question forward because I'd like to clarify what that's about. Highway 63 is a huge, huge project, and we plan on getting it done. But let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's a \$2 billion project. I have to go by what the hon. members on the other side keep saying: delay, delay, delay. We don't want to delay. We're trying to get it done as fast as we possibly can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister has already been delaying, delaying, delaying that project.

To the minister again: with Alberta coming out of the recession and the oil sands being very much in demand world-wide, would it not be essential to complete this infrastructure in a timely fashion?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the hon. member to know that we're spending \$190 million on highway 63 this year. We're carrying on with two complete interchanges. We're carrying on with a five-lane bridge that we're building in Fort McMurray. I agree that people in Fort McMurray deserve a great quality of life. We're moving ahead with the infrastructure as fast as we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: will the minister commit to completing the twinning of highway 63 before 2015? You found \$2 billion for carbon capture, but you don't have enough money to fix this highway properly.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again I have to tell you that we're moving ahead as fast as we can. We partnered with the federal government on this, and they're actually going to put \$150 million into this project. We are moving ahead with it. We can only do as much as our budget allows us to do, so I can't promise an actual date of finishing it.

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

Villa Caritas Geriatric Mental Health Facility (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I attended the official opening of Villa Caritas, which is an outstanding state-of-the-art facility for geriatric mental health patients in west Edmonton. While everyone was very supportive of this new facility and the outstanding mental health services it will provide, several attendees had some questions, which I will be addressing to the Minister of Health and Wellness. While this appears to be a good move for the patients referred, why is it taking so long to present concrete actions for numerous other Albertans who are experiencing mental health . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's true that we're working on a province-wide strategy to help people with addictions and/or mental health issues. In fact, it's a staple in our five-year health action plan. But let's not lose sight of the fact that we're already spending over \$500 million to help people with these particular circumstances. We are also opening up new mental health treatment and residential beds, about 35 of them, that I just announced. We're also adding 65 mental health staff into our schools and clinics throughout Alberta. We're also augmenting the 90 clinics that we have across Alberta that help people with mental health and/or addictions issues. Finally, we're also doing everything we can to bring in experts in this area to help us craft the best strategy for mental health going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: what impact will the decision to use Villa Caritas as a facility to support seniors with mental health issues, not as a long-term bed facility as originally intended, have on seniors looking for long-term care beds in Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the good news is that the long-term care beds that were available at the old Edmonton General hospital site still are available. I was there not long ago visiting some folks, and I can tell you that the care there is truly outstanding.

With respect to other people who might require these kinds of services, please know that the services will be there. We're opening a lot more continuing care spaces for people who have that level of need, and we're opening more residential and detox beds, or treatment beds as they're called, for people in those circumstances.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: since only 106 of 150 beds will be occupied by the patients from Alberta Hospital Edmonton, what are the plans for the remaining 44 beds, and who will be occupying them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we're going to augment the 106 beds up to 120 beds specifically for geriatric mental health patients. When you combine that with the other beds referred to, that will increase our mental health capacity for that group by about 42 per cent in our area. That's a huge increase. With respect to the other 30 beds those are going to be specialized transition beds to help address the needs of seniors with mental health issues.

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

Workplace Safety (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nine workers injured in a well explosion yesterday remind us of this government's chronic record of failure on workplace safety. The minister's self-congratulatory announcement on new inspectors merely brings Alberta up to the national average a few years from now. To the

minister: will he agree that injured workers and their families can't afford to wait and hire 40 new inspectors this year?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this government has made a solid commitment to occupational health and safety. We have increased enforcement of occupational health and safety. We have increased education. We are working in co-operation both with organized labour and with employers to make sure that we develop the best practices. We have increased the number of occupational health and safety inspectors by 52 per cent just in one year. We will be monitoring it. If there is economic growth and if we find that it is warranted to have additional officers, that is always open. The number 40 is as good a number as . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, given that Tory funding for worker safety is lower today than it was in 1991 while at the same time the number of Albertans working in dangerous occupations has more than doubled and given that our province's worker fatality rate continues well above the national average, will the minister admit that his hold-the-line budget for worker safety in the face of increased industrial activity is a predictable recipe for more worker injury and deaths?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member calls it Tory funding for occupational health and safety. I have clearly indicated that occupational health and safety is fully funded by all employers in the province of Alberta. So maybe indirectly she is correct because most sensible employers in Alberta tend to be Tory supporters. But the fact of the matter is that there is a great expense for occupational health and safety, and we have full commitment not only by employers but also by workers within the sectors.

Ms Notley: Well, employers are Tory supporters because they pay the lowest WCB premiums in the country, Minister.

Given that Alberta is one of the few provinces in the country to not mandate worker safety committees by law, giving the tools to the very workers whose lives are otherwise at risk, can the minister explain this glaring omission and tell us how workers are supposed to keep themselves safe in this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the member just contradicted herself. The reason Alberta employers pay the lowest WCB premiums is that that reflects the caseload and the number of claims that WCB is dealing with. However, I don't know how many times I can reiterate it. I'm not only saying it, but I'm actually walking the talk to show all Alberta workers that their safety on the job is our priority. Albertans demand safe workplaces, and they shall receive safe workplaces.

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

Energy Efficiency Building Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An updated national building code featuring higher energy efficiency standards for all large buildings is expected by the end of 2011 and for houses by the end of 2012. Three years ago this government committed to implementing energy efficiency standards in building codes for homes and commercial buildings in its climate change strategy. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: have Albertans been misled as it appears there is no action on this file three years later?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member. No doubt, we continue to do our work. The building codes and the energy codes are part of a national process that we are undertaking, and we are working with our federal and provincial and territorial counterparts to see this move. The member is right. The building code, the one part, was actually published, I believe, on November 29 of 2010 to become effective in 2011, and we're following that.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Minister. You've answered part of the question, which would be: is this government going to adopt national building codes for large buildings and houses, or are we waiting for an Alberta solution? The building codes are there. Why don't we just slip in underneath, and they're effective?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate to say that we should have only one building code. Rather than having interim codes, we are working with our national counterparts to bring in one code that will be suitable for all Albertans. Certainly, we are hearing from Albertans as well that they want changes for both the commercial buildings and their residential buildings and that energy efficiency is extremely important to them. We're looking at all of those aspects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: will you commit to having these national energy standards for large buildings by the end of 2012 and for houses by the end of 2013? How close are we to having the national standard by those dates?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are still doing a review of the consultation that we did. There was a lot of consultation that occurred in the fall of 2009. We met with stakeholders. Now that we're talking about energy efficiencies, we met with them to see how they might be implemented in the Alberta building codes for both homes and other buildings. We are waiting, basically, to look at implementing the model codes when they become available later on this year and into 2012.

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

Health Research Funding

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've all heard about Alberta's excellent track record when it comes to life-changing and life-saving health research. If you haven't, please call me; I'd be glad to fill you in. We're making great strides towards curing diabetes, eliminating viruses, and better understanding the human brain. Yet I still get challenged with rumours that funding for this kind of research is in jeopardy. My questions today are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Bottom line: is funding for health research in Alberta increasing or decreasing?

Mr. Weadick: Well, I'd like to thank the member for that question. I'm very pleased to say today that in 2010-2011 Alberta Innovates will be putting \$83 million into health research in this province. That's up from \$75 million only one year ago, so a significant increase. This research will go into all types of health research across the province, and we're so excited to see this research being done right here.

The Speaker: And his budget will be dealt with on April 12. Proceed.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My second question is to the same minister. Will research funding be available for research that has the potential to reduce wait-lists or address other challenges facing our current health care system here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is one of the focuses of health research being done. In fact, on Friday we were in Calgary at the University of Calgary opening the medical ward of the 21st century, a place where companies and doctors can go to test the newest equipment, look at new ways of delivering health care that are more patient focused. There's a company called Xsensor out of Calgary that has designed a sheet that goes on the bed and will detect pressure points and allow nurses to turn patients in time to get rid of bed sores and those kinds of things. This is critical research that's moving us forward.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. To the same minister: there are also questions that this strategy is considered political interference in research.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. Yes, I have heard that. I think it's critically important that the government sets priorities for its spending of tax dollars. At the high level the government has set some priority areas around maternal and child health and around addictions and other things. I think that's critically important. Alberta Innovates will determine which areas are going to be funded, how they're going to be funded, which programs will receive the funding, and it's up to them to try to prioritize those projects. So it is at arm's length to government.

Thank you.

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

Capital Infrastructure Planning

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that this government continues to miss the lesson when it comes to prioritizing infrastructure. We have a government that is putting MLA offices ahead of children in severely overcrowded classrooms and ahead of seniors stuck in acute-care beds and ER patients in the halls of our hospitals. To the Minister of Infrastructure: are you as ignorant and as fiscally irresponsible as the Member for Edmonton-Calder to say that had you prioritized schools and seniors' care facilities ahead of the federal building, construction workers would have no work?

The Speaker: We're going to find some temperance in language in here, or we're going to have a real shambles, points of privilege included.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. I think the hon. member opposite needs to know that we are building 14 new schools at this time: 10 core schools, four high schools. We have 41 health projects that are on the go, five major hospital builds, five cancer institutes that we're building, and we are also building 13 seniors' projects, that are going to have over a thousand spaces. That is part of what this government is doing in relation to infrastructure.

Mr. Hinman: It's good that he prioritizes his answers. I wish he'd prioritize his buildings.

Given that this government was in complete denial of the economic conditions that we were in when they decided to go ahead with the federal building, does the minister really think that if we were to have had a prioritized public infrastructure list at the time, the citizens of Alberta would have agreed to renovate the federal building ahead of desperately needed long-term care beds for seniors and classrooms for our overcrowded children?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I need to express to the hon. member opposite that there is a balance. There is a balance to having health care facilities. There is a balance with educational facilities, schools. At the same time, we do have to have office buildings, and those office buildings hold individuals that are there to help Albertans, to serve the needs of Albertans. We cannot stop development or construction.

I also need to say to you that this project was started in 2008.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the federal building stood vacant for 20 years, a delay of two or three more years would not have changed the value or the opportunity to redevelop the property.

How long will the minister continue to declare that new MLA offices are more urgent than the need to move our seniors out of acute-care beds and into long-term care facilities and our children out of severely overcrowded classrooms into new schools? He needs to make the list public. Prioritize the list and make it public.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that the hon. member opposite heard. The list is public. All he has to do is look it up on the website, maybe pay attention to the newspapers as he usually does. I would say to you: 14 new schools, 41 projects in health care, seniors' housing. That is the list. That is the list that you have before you, and if you can't understand that list, I'm not sure how I can help you . . .

The Speaker: If the two of you don't start talking through me, I'm not going to recognize either one of you again for a long period of time.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Cattle Price Insurance Program

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta cattle producers face great risks due to the volatility of the Canadian dollar and other market forces that are beyond their control. To the minister of agriculture: what, if anything, is your ministry doing to enable cattle producers to protect themselves in these turbulent times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government does recognize the effects of the volatility of the cattle market on our Canadian dollar, and we have produced an insurance program for calves that's being handled through the AFSC. It's a market-driven program to add some surety to the industry. It reflects the market prices as indicated through our auction marts throughout the province to make sure that there are safeguards for these producers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Now, that sounds good if you're a large-scale producer, but is this available for smaller and medium-sized producers, or are they even eligible to apply?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The size of the operation doesn't matter for coverage in this program. You have to be an agricultural producer that raises livestock and to have them for over 60 days. You have to be over the age of 18. That's the policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. We've enabled the beef producers with this price insurance option, and that's good, but is it available to the producers of any of the other livestock species we raise here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This program is fairly new. We started it with a portion of the livestock, the cattle industry, initially. We are moving now to develop a program for the hog sector also. Of course, agriculture is our largest renewable industry in this province, so it's important that we keep it viable, and these programs are going to help.

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

Health Authority Administrative Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government until 2006 gave taxpayers a breakdown of administrative expenses incurred directly by health authorities. These expenses were broken down by general administration, human resources, finance, et cetera. My first question is to the minister of health. Why did this government in 2006 stop the good accounting practice of giving taxpayers a breakdown of the millions of dollars that were spent annually on administrative expenses by health authorities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't carry around information going back to 2006 in my hip pocket. I'm sure that the accounting that is done and the reporting back to Albertans that is done on a regular basis would cover off some of those questions the hon. member is asking.

Secondly, if he has that kind of detail that he wants to go back five years, perhaps he should bring it forward in a more proper forum.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about a Previous Responsibility

The Speaker: I would refer all members to *Beauchesne's* 409(6).

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: This minister is responsible for the budgets of not only this year but of previous years for the health department.

The Speaker: Sit down. He is only responsible for the budgets that he is minister of during that time frame. He's not responsible for anything that happened in 1934.

Proceed.

Health Authority Administrative Expenses

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: I'm not talking about 1934; I'm talking about 2006.

Given that after 2006 – after 2006 – hon. minister, administration fees skyrocketed by millions of dollars annually, who ordered the changes to be made so that there was no longer a full disclosure of these administrative fees in your annual reports?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is full disclosure. There always is. Not only that, but it's also audited.

I think that what the hon. member is missing here, though, is the large population growth that this province has experienced. People are moving here for a reason, and one of them is the best health care services anywhere in the country.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, more money was spent, and there was less disclosure.

Again to the minister: are any legal fees directly incurred by the health authorities hidden in the category of general administration?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where they put legal fees specifically, but I'm sure that they're there. I'm sure they're accounted for. What we can do is find out exactly which line item they're included in.

I can assure you that it's important to have people who represent you on legal fronts. Sometimes you need them for your own protection here.

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

2:40

NAIT Program Closures

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the minister of advanced education. Minister, every year an academic review is conducted to determine the long-term need for programs of study at an institution such as NAIT in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder. Apprenticeship training programs have never been in question, yet others have been terminated due to a lack of enrolment. Given the current demands for avionics and airframe professionals and that both programs are fully subscribed, can the minister tell me why these and seven other programs are being considered for termination?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important issue, and I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing it up. Each and every year all of our postsecondary institutions review all of their programs, and we believe that they should. We believe it's critically important that they deliver the programs that Albertans need, that they deliver the services so our young people and our tradesmen can get jobs. Each and every year they review them. Through that process they come up with new programs they'd like to add and programs they'd like to remove. This is one of those where that particular school has suggested these programs for removal.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My only supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has the final say in these matters, what will he be basing his decision on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the institution NAIT will come before the department and make their recommendations as to what we should do with these programs, what enrolment for the future looks like, what the employment picture for these trades will be, and what it would look like across Campus Alberta for delivery. We'll wait, and we'll work with that institution to see what the outcome is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: No further questions.

The Speaker: That's it? Okay.

Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today. That was 104 questions and responses

In a few seconds from now we will continue with the Routine. We will be going to Members' Statements in 15 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Affordable Housing Project in Strathmore

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We often hear about the high cost of living in Alberta, and as we come out of this economic downturn, I don't expect this to change. What has changed, however, is the public expenditure of resources and know-how to make home ownership affordable to more lower income Albertans.

I had the pleasure of attending the project launch for the perpetually affordable housing project, that highlighted the innovation in housing that we're seeing across the province. The town of Strathmore has entered into a partnership with Classic Communities to develop a 48-unit perpetually affordable home ownership project. Housing and Urban Affairs has committed over \$1.6 million to the town of Strathmore.

This funding along with commitments from the town of Strathmore, the Strathmore affordable housing society, and Classic Communities has created a unique opportunity for low-income families. These are two- and three-bedroom units and are affordable to families making as little as \$25,000 a year in annual income. The units will remain affordable in perpetuity, approximately 70 per cent of market value, regardless of changes in the market, thanks to the public funds remaining in the equity of this project. While people of all ages can qualify to invest in this project, it is particularly attractive to young people who want to invest in home ownership. This project offers the opportunity for home ownership at a cost that is competitive with local rental rates.

Mr. Speaker, partnerships with the private sector, municipalities, and nonprofit organizations have enabled Housing and Urban Affairs to reduce its budget by 36 per cent while at the same time meeting targets for increased affordable housing and, in this case, home ownership. This project is an example of an innovative and responsible expenditure of public funding.

I would like to acknowledge the town of Strathmore, Classic Communities, and the Strathmore affordable housing society for enabling home ownership and allowing lower income earners to make an investment in their future through equity in their own homes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Children's Mental Health and Addiction Initiatives

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2009, after consultation with mental health and addictions experts, parents, and

children, I introduced the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act. With the support of this very House it passed. Upon proclamation of the bill children abusing drugs would be held in treatment for 10 days and not the current five. PCHAD, as it's known, was the sixth bill out of 62 introduced by government during the spring session. That shows me that it was a priority of the government at the time.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, I can't say the same now. It is still waiting to be proclaimed and made into law. Addictions professionals have all indicated that five days of treatment is not enough to unpickle their brain and get them ready for the rest of their lives by keeping these children clean and sober. The government's track record on children, especially our most vulnerable, is shameful. The Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act is another one of the 62 bills that are waiting to be made the law of the land. This sends a clear message, Mr. Speaker: abused and vulnerable children do not seem to be a priority of this government.

Mental health and addiction treatment is a growing concern for all Albertans. While the government talks more and more about the importance of treating addiction and mental health issues, they do not back this talk up with action. Action, Mr. Speaker, talks louder than words. Action would be proclaiming these bills immediately. People with mental health and addiction issues are stuck in a vicious cycle that they cannot get out of alone. There are people that end up in hospitals, correctional facilities, or even homeless. If the government was truly serious, as indicated in the Speech from the Throne, they would properly fund mental health and addiction initiatives and consult with the experts in the field.

We need to move forward, Mr. Speaker. We need to move forward now and do what's right for our Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, en français, s'il vous plaît.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui je me lève à l'Assemblée pour souligner le début des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration nationale de la culture, de la langue, et du patrimoine français qui se déroulera du 4 au 20 mars.

Ici en Alberta les communautés francophones ont lancé les festivités le 4 mars 2011 avec des levers de drapeaux partout à travers la province, et les festivités se poursuivront pendant les deux prochaines semaines pour tous les Albertains de tous les âges et d'origines diverses. Le thème cette année célèbre comment l'interaction enrichit la compréhension, quelque chose que l'on connaît bien en Alberta.

Pour les francophones cette interaction est ancrée depuis 150 ans avec l'établissement de St. Albert, la plus vieille colonisation de langue française de la province. Les Pères Oblats et les Sœurs Grises ont travaillé étroitement avec les Premières nations et les Métis afin d'accroître le commerce et afin de construire certaines des premières écoles et des premiers hôpitaux de la province.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie sont une occasion pour interagir l'un avec l'autre et pour découvrir le nouveau visage de la francophonie albertaine. En valorisant l'interaction et le partage de notre richesse culturelle, nous aidons nos communautés à croître, et nous créons une société plus accueillante et inclusive.

M. le Président, je tiens à remercier les membres de cette Chambre pour leur appui continu, et je vous invite tous à participer à ces célébrations afin de souligner les contributions des francophones au riche patrimoine albertain.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Northland Community Engagement Team

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January 2010 the Minister of Education dissolved the Northland school division board and appointed an official trustee to oversee the jurisdiction. He also appointed an inquiry team to look at the governance, management, and operations of this vast northern jurisdiction. In January of this year the inquiry team issued its report, calling for an improvement strategy to focus on three priorities: English and aboriginal language and numeracy development, improving student attendance, and strengthening parental engagement with schools by improving communication and trust.

Earlier this month a team with strong connections to aboriginal education was established to provide strategic advice, direction, and leadership to address these issues. This team will engage the community in the transformation of Northland into a special-purpose authority for aboriginal education, one able to capitalize on its unique character to provide excellence in First Nations and Métis education. The team will be led by the capable Member for Lesser Slave Lake and Dr. Colin Kelly, the official trustee, and includes community elders, Métis and Treaty 8 members, a postsecondary member, and a member of the FNMI Education Partnership Council.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that two of the members are from my constituency, Mr. Alvin Findlay of the Métis local 1994 and Dave MacPhee of the Aseniwuche Nation. Their mission will be to develop and deliver strategies and initiatives we know are crucial to the educational success of the boys and girls who depend on Northland schools to prepare them for their future. Clearly, communities need to be involved in those strategies and initiatives.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I echo the sentiments of the Minister of Education, who said that "engaging Northland communities in the future of education of their young people is essential if we want the students in those communities to find genuine and lasting success."

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this Assembly I thank the members of the team for their commitment to FNMI education and their willingness to participate in this incredibly important work.

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

Meadows Fire and EMS Station

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Meadows fire and rescue station. Located at 28th Avenue and 34th Street in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Meadows fire and emergency medical services station opened in October of 2009. The cost of constructing the more than 14,000 square foot facility was \$6.5 million. Going forward, the station will save resources by having fire and emergency medical services at the same site. It also means quicker response time if the call is coming from the same area.

I was very fortunate to be in attendance at the grand opening alongside many community members and Edmonton's mayor, Stephen Mandel. Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Meadows fire and EMS station would not have been possible had it not been for the funding from the provincial government under the guidance of this province's Premier.

This funding was made possible through the municipal sustainability initiative, known as MSI. MSI is the province of Alberta's commitment to providing significant long-term funding to enhance municipal sustainability and to enable municipalities to meet the demand of growth. The opening of the Meadows fire and EMS station is a perfect example of how MSI funding can directly impact a community and help it meet its needs.

I commend this very important program and would like to recognize its benefits to the Meadows community of Mill Woods. To all the officers and members of Meadows fire and rescue station: keep up the good job you are all doing, and we salute you for making our community better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, celebrated today by people around the world, people who are doing their best to ensure that women everywhere enjoy better health, safety, respect, freedom, and equal pay for equal work. I'm proud to say that in my constituency of Edmonton-Riverview there's an organization dedicated to pursuing those goals. WISEST, Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology, is an organization created by the University of Alberta designed to increase gender diversity in the workplace, especially in the fields that constitute its acronym.

Since 1982 WISEST has been encouraging women to choose careers in science and engineering. Over 600 volunteers develop programs to draw more women to these fields. WISEST reaches out to girls and young women while they are still in secondary school, providing opportunities to get a taste of what it's like to work in science or engineering. Their efforts have certainly borne fruit. Across Canada women are now pursuing undergraduate science degrees at university in roughly equal numbers to men.

Of course, much work remains to be done. Women remain in the minority at the postgraduate level and in high-level leadership positions in industry and academia and government. Women still don't earn as much as men doing equivalent jobs, and the glass ceiling remains firmly in place across a wide spectrum of industries and institutions. But, Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that one day we'll solve these problems and create a society with true equality and freedom for everyone, a society rich with opportunities for girls and boys, women and men, one in which culture, religion, sexual orientation, skin colour, or gender never interfere with anyone's human rights or potential.

People like the folks at WISEST are working to create a better world, and I thank them for it.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2010 activities. Additional copies of the report have also been provided for all members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the topic of occupational health and safety, while our inspectors right now are doing focused inspections of forklifts and related equipment, I would like to table the required amount of a new publication known as Forklift Health & Safety: Best Practices Guideline.

It's a brand new guideline that is available to employers and employees both in paper and electronic format. I would encourage all employers to take a look at it. It's showing them what the best practices and usage are of these potentially very dangerous pieces of equipment.

Also, Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees. For situations where workers are required to work alone, guidelines and best practices for those.

On a somewhat different topic, Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to table five copies of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2010 annual report, as required.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will be tabling the required number of the annual report of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta for the year 2010.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I have down the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Is anybody doing a tabling on his behalf?

Then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, one from Wendy Aikins in Fort Macleod and Bonnie May in Lethbridge, both of whom are appalled at the permission given for the deforestation of blocks of forestry in the special places Castle-Crown area.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Centre, were you doing a tabling?

Ms Blakeman: No, sir. That was yesterday.

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 seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness area: Peter McClure, Randy Jaggard, Lin Heidt, Cat Neshine, Carole Gregoire-Voskamp, Barb Collier, Kelly Marsh, Lisa Mutch, Ena Spalding, Tim Coogan, Shirley Whalen, Jim Laird, Lois Betteridge, Ruth Zenger, Tom Wispinski, Peter Ward, Tracy Jacobson, Siobhan Brennan, Susan Brooks, Brian Vaccaro, Shirley Langlois, Gordon and Ann Rycroft, Lynn Taylor, Geraldine Young, and Chris Brown.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling here, and it's the requisite number of copies from the county of Barrhead. It's a copy of the minutes of the council meeting held on July 21, 2009, where a resolution was carried to purchase two tables for a supper scheduled on November 21, 2009, a copy of the cheque that was sent to pay for two tables, a copy of the invitation to the event, and a copy of the list of people who attended. I just put that on the record. It is in regard to my question earlier today.

The Speaker: In regard to my 30th anniversary.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, it was. I hope it was a wonderful time.

The Speaker: It was, and they all ate.

3:00

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

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 9
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments, a little bit, in response to some of the opposition members who were actually interested enough to be here before. To the point, the budget. The \$4.8 billion deficit is actually very close to what was forecast. As a matter of fact, it's within \$73 million.

I think it's interesting, Mr. Chairman, to look historically at the trend around the sup estimates: from 2005-06 a supplementary estimate that was 13 per cent of the budget falling over time in '06-07 to 7 per cent, in '07-08 to 6 per cent, in '08-09 to 3 per cent, in '09-10 to 3 per cent, and now to 2 per cent. I think the direction that the government has gone to manage and forecast as well as possible their expenditures and then to live with them is not only backed up by the numbers; it's certainly backed up by the trend.

It is interesting that some of the counsel being provided to the Wildrose's last opportunity was three and a half times what our supplementary supply is now, but that was then. Mr. Chairman, it's a simple point that this is the smallest sup in the absolute dollar amount and relative to the original appropriation of the year. So I look forward to the comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to again get an opportunity to participate in the debate or discussion regarding Bill 9, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011. We again are looking at significant amounts of money in various departments, but I'm told – I'm reassured, actually – it's not as much as usual. It's puzzling to me, just the general tone of the government these days. They're certainly like an unrepentant teenager asking for a larger allowance without any explanation as to where they spent what they already got and what they intend to do with this.

I was startled in question period today when I was directing questions regarding the financial statements of a ministry. "Well, we don't want to talk about this. We can't talk about it because it was in the past." Well, whenever you look at the past expenditures of this government and their past habits of requesting additional funding through supplementary supply, certainly it is an indication that the budget and the budgeting process initially, regardless of what year we're in, is not a sound exercise.

The numbers that we're dealing with are not sound because we seem to be always coming back, regardless of the circumstances, asking for more, whether it's in Aboriginal Relations, whether it's in Advanced Education and Technology. Certainly, in Children and Youth Services and Employment and Immigration, when we were discussing this before, it struck a chord with me because last year I looked in government estimates and the same elements that were cut last year around this time in the budgeting process: well, we're now looking for that money back. We need that money.

I don't for a minute doubt the sincerity of the hon. minister of children's services nor the Minister of Employment and Immigration. As a result of circumstances that are very, very difficult to control, they need the money to fund their programs. I have no doubt about that. But there are other areas to be cut, Mr. Chairman, other than those programs last year. The people programs seem to be the first to go.

Now, the other day I was waiting for the budget to be released, and I thought, for instance, I would add up the amount of money

over the years that Horse Racing Alberta has received: \$365 million plus what's there this year. That's pretty close to \$400 million over a short period of time. I would use that, Mr. Chairman, as an example of the wrong priorities of a government. That program should be eliminated, but it's not. Instead what do we do? We nickel and dime ministries like Children and Youth Services, like Employment and Immigration, and we have to at some point go back through the supplementary supply process and ask for more money. That would only be one example, and I'm not going to discuss it any further now.

Certainly, I think if this government was sincere about fiscal control or fiscal restraint, they would reduce the size of cabinet. A smart government is not necessarily one that's 24 or 22 ministries. It could be reduced significantly, perhaps as far down as 16 or 17 portfolios. I think that would work. That is not unreasonable or, I don't think, unusual.

Now, I would like specifically at this time to talk about Justice and Attorney General, the Justice department and the request here for 9 and a half million dollars. We are looking at initiatives for safe communities. Good idea. You can go back and you can see in previous annual reports where some of that money – and I'm on memory here, Mr. Chairman, and please correct me if I'm wrong – went unexpended. The additions from this supplementary amount plus interim ministry transfers will increase the budget for the safe communities program from \$18 million to over \$30 million. That's better than 65 per cent. The supplementary amount will contribute 49 per cent more than what was originally budgeted and, I believe, the same amount more in a percentage than was spent in the last fiscal year.

Safe communities initiatives, as we know, cover a wide range of activities. Could the government please explain precisely which of these activities require the additional funding? In particular, how much of the additional funding is for the safe communities innovation fund, which provides funding to community-based crime prevention and crime reduction projects?

Now, according to the ministry's 2009-10 annual report the ministry developed elaborate processes to educate communities about plans, services, and funding opportunities relating to the safe communities program as well as a process designed to deliver grant funding effectively. I had the opportunity of attending in a local school gymnasium one of these meetings to educate the community members, and I was kind of taken aback by how the grant funding programs worked. I had to correct some of the government employees that were there, that this was taxpayer money; it didn't belong to the governing party. That was what the people in attendance were led to believe. There were two parts of this funding, and again I had to correct those who were there on behalf of this government, explaining the safe communities program, about exactly where the money was coming from, who was responsible for it, and where it should go.

3:10

One would assume that spending on grant programs is well within the control of the ministry. Also, this is, as far as I know, certainly not a new grant program. The ministry reported funding 30 pilot projects in 2009-10, so it has significant experience in administering the program. Again, can the government please explain why this program exceeded its budget by close to half and what the ministry has done during the current fiscal year to bring this overspending back into line? Since the funds were delivered to the local communities, can the government explain what specific results were expected from the spending this year and how, specifically, the recipients of grant funding are contributing to the ministry's performance goals with respect to safe communities?

In conclusion of my questions regarding Justice at this time and this 9 and a half million dollar request: can the government please explain why the program again exceeded its budget and what we're doing to ensure that this doesn't happen in the future?

Now, I have a few more questions as well, Mr. Chairman, regarding the Infrastructure budget. Certainly, we heard earlier in question period from the government how important they consider infrastructure. With this request we're looking for a little better than \$57 million in infrastructure spending. But I note that last year in the fiscal plan, not the current one that we're debating in budget estimates, there was anywhere between a 10 per cent and a 20 per cent reduction in construction contracts from what was anticipated to what eventually happened after all the bid packages were opened and a decision was made regarding who was going to do what, where, and for how much. With that kind of cost saving it's not unusual to expect that a capital plan can be stretched out over a long period of time and get more projects built for the budget that is set aside. You may have to wait a year or two longer – that's true – but, certainly, you're going to get a much better bang for your buck.

If I can believe what I'm reading in the fiscal plan, if I can believe that it is true and that there are these savings that I talked about, 10 to 20 per cent, then my question would be: why, then, do we need this additional money?

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to remind this House of the news program I watched, where the Premier was talking about getting ahead of all this construction now, before inflation hit. I was wondering what sort of economic advice the Premier was getting that wasn't being shared with the citizens or the taxpayers. I know that in Brazil there are significant pressures on the cost of living. Certainly, there are in other areas of the world. We, fortunately, are not faced with that here. But the Premier seemed bound and determined that we had to proceed with a lot of these projects before costs went sky-high, and I would like an explanation as to the Premier's concerns and issues regarding this inflationary threat and how the \$57.6 million that's requested under Infrastructure may or may not be affected.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. To begin with, Mr. Chair, I think what we as Alberta's Official Opposition, the Liberal Party, have been saying all along with regard to health – it's not money; it's management – can basically be applied to the whole budgetary process. I find it absolutely amazing that we are spending in this month of March alone practically three-quarters of a billion dollars to tide us over.

Now, I appreciate the statistics that the hon. minister of the Treasury Board and finance provided us, that we're within 2 per cent of where we should be. In other words, if you were to look at it from the other end and you were assigning a mark, you'd say: well, let's give the government 98 per cent on their ability to anticipate. What other province has this kind of money? Yet the efficiency with which they choose to invest their monies seems to create a much more productive result than what we're seeing here in Alberta.

If three-quarters of a billion dollars represents only 2 per cent of the 2010-2011 budget, then surely we can be using that money in a better fashion, investing, as we have suggested and in my response to the throne speech, in terms of putting people first. But that's not what's happening. People are getting hammered in this budget. Again, what we see is the government continuing, for example, to underwrite horse racing to the tune of \$25 million; \$400 million on the ponies has been sort of bet away.

Now, when you look at what happened with the AISH budgeting and the supplemental supply, AISH has been frozen. Talk about vulnerable people: \$1,083 plus some pharmaceutical benefits.

We look at what happened with ESL. There's a growing trend. It's called: beat up on your immigrant population. Last year the government cut funding for the English Express newspaper, that was a key tool in teaching English as a second language to students throughout the province. Now, not only did Advanced Education beat up on ESL students last year, but they seem to have set a trend because this year Education reduced the funding for English as a second language, and Employment and Immigration also cut back on ESL support programs. What are we saying to the world, that immigration isn't important to us?

The minister tried to pass it off as being a federal problem. Yes, the feds determine what the immigration rules are, but once the individuals arrive in this province, we don't expect the federal government to keep providing the additional subsidy and support. The province should be responsible for the people within its borders.

Another example of a very sad circumstance and a very vulnerable population is special-needs funding in Education. It's frozen for the third year running. The Education proposed budget barely covers the cost of the increased bargained wages for the last year of a five-year contract. Unless the Minister of Education can persuade his counterparts in Treasury, we're going to see severe reductions in teachers and staff throughout the province, which is going to have a very adverse effect on students and their learning.

Speaking of students and learning, the government seems to have something against innovation. AISI, the program that's supposed to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking in the education program: its budget was sliced in half. Now, I don't see that as being progressive. Possibly it fits into the conservative half of the equation, but it certainly isn't progressive.

3:20

Also, in advanced education, instead of increasing grants and bursaries, what the government has done is increased loans. In other words, it's increased debt. In speaking with members of the representatives of students in colleges and technical institutes this morning, they're very concerned about what happened, for example, at Red Deer College, which seems to have followed what's happened at the U of A and the U of C. At Red Deer College their facility fee, basically, from which they derive no direct benefit, academic or otherwise, has been increased by \$290 for the year. At the U of A and the U of C it's closer to \$500. Again, there's no comparative benefit for that increased funding.

The whole nature of the budgeting process, what the government considers to be a priority – for example, my hon. Member for Calgary-McCall was concerned with the Minister of Transportation about how long it's taking to finally twin highway 63, which is the direct route to Alberta's most valuable, hopefully sustainable resource wealth. The government was willing to spend \$2 billion on carbon sequestration, which is just a single tool, versus getting people and goods safely back and forth to Fort McMurray.

Again, Mr. Chair, it's not the amount of money so much as how the money is invested. My concerns with sup supply may seem to the Treasury ministry as just being a small amount, only 2 per cent of the actual amount of the 2010-2011 budget, but 700-plus million dollars is a significant amount of money and should be invested wisely. I don't see renewable projects being supported. We've seen reductions in Education. We've seen reductions to Employment and Immigration. We've seen freezing in programs like AISH and special needs. There doesn't seem to be any investment in people or diversification.

The government has further subsidized drilling projects where incentives are no longer required to get the drilling up and run-

ning. The government has basically given the majority of the money that it earned through the increased land sales, that it bragged about, back to the industry in terms of drilling initiatives. It's the sense that Albertans have trouble getting a handle on.

Then we not only have supplemental supply, Mr. Chair, but very shortly we're going to have interim supply, and then as of April 1 we're going to have the main budget kick into effect.

Mr. Chair, I am concerned about how quickly we're burning through the sustainability fund. I'm very grateful for that fund. As has been pointed out frequently, it was a Liberal suggestion that was gratefully taken by this government. But even in the worst of economic times, if we're not using the money that we have in the wisest manner possible, which, incidentally, includes putting at least some away in the heritage trust fund – it has not grown, basically, since Lougheed left it.

Now, one of the financial arguments that I find rather ludicrous is the notion that had we built up our heritage trust fund to a greater extent last year, we would have lost even more from it in terms of poor investments. Again, Mr. Chair, this draws a direct relationship with the types of investments the government made and continues to make that don't produce the types of returns that are necessary.

As I said under putting people first in my response to the throne speech, if we are to diversify our economy, then we have to invest in education. We have to bring into account the English as a second language students, whether it's in immigration and employment or whether it's in education. We have to invest in early childhood/kindergarten programs. We have to provide that half-day programming support. We have to provide full-day support for kindergarten students. This would serve two purposes. It would reduce the need for child care, and it would also provide an education for those young children.

We are so fortunate in this province that we are still able to have nonrenewable resources serve as the basis of our economy, but, Mr. Chair, if we don't use the money that we currently have from those nonrenewable resources to diversify our economy, chiefly through education and through supports for our people, where are we going to be years down the road, when our nonrenewable resources are depleted or alternative energy sources are discovered that render them less attractive? There is this tremendous rush to get everything out of the ground, and in so doing, we're not only exploiting our resources, but we're exploiting the people who take those resources out of the ground.

Mr. Chair, we're fortunate to have this economic circumstance. We should be viewing it as a blessing rather than a problem. Until we start to manage our economy better and prioritize our investments, beginning with people, we're going to continue to be riding these boom-and-bust cycles because the majority of our economy is based on external, globally set prices. We've got to get off this rollercoaster and invest in our people, diversify our economy. It's going to take more than 14 per cent participation in postsecondary or a two-thirds graduation from high school rate in three years as opposed to going back for a fourth and a fifth.

Mr. Chair, probably our least realized resource yet the source of ongoing problems is our support for First Nations. Seventy per cent of the children in care come from First Nations. First Nations are the most rapidly growing portion of the population. First Nations represent the solution if we invest in First Nations in terms of restoration of pride, opportunities to participate in the economy, not through converting or subverting but in recognizing the abilities and qualities and moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members?
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hancock	Ouellette
Berger	Hayden	Quest
Brown	Horne	Redford
Calahasen	Jacobs	Rogers
Campbell	Klimchuk	Sandhu
DeLong	Knight	Snelgrove
Drysdale	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Lindsay	Vandermeer
Fritz	Oberle	Webber
Griffiths	Olson	Zwozdesky
Groeneveld		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	MacDonald
Blakeman	Hinman	Mason
Boutilier	Kang	Taylor
Chase		

Totals: For – 31 Against – 10

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion that the committee rise and report progress carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Fritz	Oberle
Amery	Griffiths	Olson
Berger	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Blakeman	Hancock	Quest
Brown	Horne	Redford
Calahasen	Jacobs	Rogers
Campbell	Kang	Sandhu
Chase	Klimchuk	Snelgrove
DeLong	Knight	Vandermeer
Drysdale	Leskiw	Webber
Fawcett	Lindsay	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Mason
Boutilier	MacDonald	Taylor

Totals: For – 33 Against – 6

[Motion that the committee rise and report progress carried]

The Chair: Now the committee shall rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 9.

[The voice vote indicated that the committee report was concurred in]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Griffiths	Oberle
Amery	Groeneveld	Olson
Berger	Hancock	Ouellette
Blakeman	Horne	Quest
Brown	Jacobs	Redford
Calahasen	Kang	Rogers
Campbell	Klimchuk	Sandhu
Chase	Knight	Snelgrove
DeLong	Leskiw	Vandermeer
Drysdale	Lindsay	Webber
Fawcett	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Taylor
Boutilier	Mason	
Totals:	For – 34	Against – 5

[The committee report was concurred in]

4:10 Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 10
Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 10, the Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, there is in the province of Alberta, I believe, a pressing need for land-use planning. In the period of time of 2001 to 2006 the province of Alberta gained a population that was almost four times the size of the population of the city of Red Deer. We have, indeed, got a population growth that also includes a growing economy and a fast-paced economy; industrial, residential, and community pressure on the land base in the province of Alberta; and concerns around the quality of our airshed and the quantity and quality of water resources. All of these things need to be taken into consideration with regional plans.

We need to remember, you know, the issues that we had. Some of the members of the House, in certain ridings in the province, would remember the issues that we had around providing adequate housing and services for the people that had come to the province to work and the issue around infrastructure that was felt to be lacking with respect to that pressure. People were very worried at that point in time about the impact of development on air, land, and water in the province and the impact also on critical habitat for wildlife, on habi-

tat for recreational areas, and the like. So, Mr. Speaker, we needed to manage multiple pressures on the landscape.

Out of that was born the land-use framework and nearly three years of consultation with Albertans with respect to land-use planning. There were always questions when we did the planning that we had initiated in the land-use framework – where is the plan? what is going to be the outcome of the land-use framework? what is this government's commitment to co-ordinated regional planning? – and the differences across the province, southern Alberta being completely different from areas in the oil sands or the forestry-intensive northwest parts of the province, and each region's unique needs and the challenges that each region had. We wanted to make sure that we considered the combined impact of all of the activities that were occurring on the land base, considered the needs for conservation, the needs for more balanced development over the long term.

From these questions that Albertans were posing to us came the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. We created the Land Stewardship Act to support regional planning, Mr. Speaker. It gives the authority to establish seven planning regions in the province based on watersheds. It will define, and has defined, what a regional plan may address.

Some examples, Mr. Speaker, would be the environmental impact and the identification of lands for conservation. We have established a role for regional advisory councils to take a look at each of the regions and provide government with their advice and a vision for a plan for each of the regions. The act would help us to establish that we can look at conservation tools that might do things like help reduce agricultural fragmentation. There are opportunities there for making sure that the eco stewardship of the land and the opportunity for eco goods and services, the benefits of that, could perhaps be enjoyed by the agricultural community.

We have respected local decision-making and people's property rights in the legislation. I can't express strongly enough, Mr. Speaker, that when we're looking at these amendments, we cannot cancel or take away, remove, or rescind somebody's land title or their freehold mineral rights or a number of other issues that, you know, had been discussed in our opportunities to be around the province talking to individuals and groups of people relative to what happens when you put a regional plan in place.

Mr. Speaker, we've also in this particular amendment made sure that we provided for compensation if private land that is identified for conservation is indeed put into things like a conservation directive. We've defined that there are statutory consents that, indeed, may require us to look at compensation. We have also defined that statutory consents do not include things like land title. Also, it's very clear that the existing provisions for compensation and appeal remain for any individual that is directly or adversely affected by what might happen in a regional plan.

I think that there have been some, probably deliberate, interpretations of the original act that were never intended. I believe that in certain circumstances as I've gone around and talked to Albertans, they in some cases were fearful, in most cases anxious. In some cases, most certainly, landowners were angry.

The Premier asked me to review the original act and to be sure that I could clarify for Albertans what the intent of this act is, and where there was necessity for change, we should look at the requirement for change and put the changes in place that would give Albertans a feeling of some comfort with respect to what the plans were intended to do. Also, Mr. Speaker, a thing that happened at that point in time was that there is now an indication that none of these regional plans will actually be enforced or approved until this review is completed and until we've had the opportunity to come here to the Legislature, look at the outcomes of Bill 10, the

Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011, and be sure that we've had a good, open, and frank debate and discussion about this situation, again, on the floor of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the changes, I think, most certainly clearly define the scope of regional plans and the focus on land and land-related activities. We do have as an intent here to be sure that we look at the pressure on the land base and to be sure that we have an opportunity for species, human settlement, natural resources, and the environment to all be considered as we move forward and design the plans that we have thoughts on for Albertans in the future.

I've got to comment a bit on property rights and compensation. We have a respect for property rights clearly stated in the front end of the legislation now, and we have also indicated that the right to all existing compensation and appeals to any other compensation issues are clearly stated. Land titles, of course, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, were never included in the definition of statutory consent, and we've clarified that. The amendment act very clearly excludes land titles from any definitions that we have, and it also excludes freehold mineral rights and a range of other personal matters. A regional plan cannot cancel a land title, and it cannot affect freehold mineral rights.

The issue of compensation, of course, you know, has been hotly debated by groups and individuals across the province, and we have clarified that nothing in this act takes away any existing right to compensation. With compensation and compensable taking of property interest under the act or under a plan, there is an opportunity for compensation, an opportunity for appeal, and an opportunity to get to the courts if you're not satisfied with what you may see at the appeal process and with the Land Compensation Board. You can apply to the Crown if you're not satisfied. If your rights are affected and you're entitled to compensation, you're certainly allowed to appeal and to go before the board, and if you're not satisfied with that, Mr. Speaker, you can indeed go to the courts with respect to your compensation.

4:20

The consultation that we've gone through, Mr. Speaker, commits the government and the province of Alberta to openness, transparency, and fairness. There was, I think, an original concern that there might be an ability for a regional plan to be established without consultation, but clearly in the amendment consultation is required. We're committed to regional plans and the advice that we get from consultation, and as we've done already, we've laid out a way for this consultation to occur through the lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan. We've received from the lower Athabasca a vision and advice to government, and of course we continue to move forward. The consultation on the lower Athabasca regional plan will take place over the next number of months, and we would continue with the amendment indicating that consultation is required. We'd continue with that framework that we have laid out. Before a plan or an amendment is made, it's clear now in the amendments that consultation is most certainly required. So there's a legal requirement for consultation.

The act would also now be amended to address unintended direct and adverse impact. Anyone that is directly and adversely affected can ask for a review. That, of course, is a new piece that is in the amendments that we're putting forward. The persons could apply to the minister for a review of a plan.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that I think would give a lot of comfort, particularly to titleholders, landowners who may have issues, is that you can actually request at any point along the progression of a regional plan that a variance be granted to you with respect to a plan. You know, you might not realize when the plan is initially incorporated that something could affect you, so you have a bit of

breathing space there to look and see how the plan is going to work. If there was some suggestion that something that was happening in a plan might affect you, you can actually apply for a variance. There's a process set out for listening with respect to variances and hearing the variances, and under most circumstances I think we would be able to grant variances and avoid any unreasonable hardship that individual might be facing with respect to regional plans.

Mr. Speaker, our opportunity here to work with local governments again is very clearly defined. We want to be sure that we co-ordinate the decisions and not override decisions that are made by regional governments and municipalities. We put an amendment here that would ensure that prior to the incorporation of a regional plan municipal development that's under way, municipal bylaws that operate relative to their land use, et cetera, would be maintained, and if there is development that is under way, that would be allowed to be completed. So there's no intention to take away the opportunity for municipal governments to do what they need to do and continue to do what they have always done with respect to regional planning in their own municipalities.

The amendments that we've made will help us, I think, to sit down and work with municipal governments across the province to be sure that there's no intention here that we would make laws in the province of Alberta that, you know, would override or change the intent of municipal bylaws. We've actually removed part of the original act, taken away a piece that actually indicated that that, in fact, could have happened.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I think there is a democratic tradition here of elected representatives determining policy for Albertans, and one of the policy areas that we do determine is the area around land use. I think it's very important that as we move forward, we have cumulative-effect management that takes into consideration the pressures on the air, water, land use, the environment, and social aspects of the province of Alberta and that we continue as elected representatives to determine that policy and make good policy that works for all Albertans.

The amended act, Mr. Speaker, most certainly creates some new checks and balances for cabinet, and it starts with the requirement to consult. It moves into an era, I think, where we'll be placing draft plans before the Legislative Assembly before they can be approved by the cabinet. New processes for review, new avenues for appeal, and I think that the result is a much more transparent regional planning process. I think that the regional plans respond to the needs and the interests of all Albertans.

As we debate, I hope we keep in mind that land-use planning is a requirement, I think, for ongoing proper development of the province of Alberta. I hope that we can also recognize that the amendments that we have put forward recognize and protect the rights and compensation of individuals and, most certainly, protect the opportunity for local decision with respect to development.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, this has been a long time in coming. I'm glad to get the opportunity to get up and get some observations on the record in the second reading portion of Bill 10, the Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011. This is a singularly important bill because it has significance in so many different arenas. There's no question that it has considerable significance and opportunity for political parties to further a particular cause. I know that one of the opposition parties, my colleagues to the . . .

An Hon. Member: Political right.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. They're seated to my left, but they certainly are not, politically, over there.

They have made hay with this over the break and have probably increased their membership based on the reaction to the initial bill. Of course, now we see the government trying to reclaim credibility and the lost ground around this.

I think this is also a significant bill because it has great impact for rural and urban issues and, in some cases, rural versus urban issues, but I will come back to that. I think that what we also see here is property rights versus public good and those two concepts coming into conflict with each other.

I was given, you know, the import of all of this. I was surprised to see the intention signalled by the government that they wanted to push the entire second reading through this afternoon, which I never think is wise because it tends to get backs up. We certainly had that signalled. I don't know that that's in fact going to happen now, but we'll see how it rolls out.

4:30

One of the things that I see in the original bill and I still see in this amending bill is reflective of a government philosophy of centralization of power, and this administration in particular has been centralization mad. You know, the health regions were centralized into one. The children's regions have been centralized down into fewer of them. This land-planning initiative is very much centralized into control that goes back into cabinet.

I also see the government's philosophy of very careful control of public input reflected in the original Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and it still exists in what I'm seeing through the amending bill.

I'm sure the minister is going to argue back with me, so I look forward to that, but I would also argue that certainly in the original bill there was a deliberate clouding of process. Very difficult to figure out what the heck was supposed to go on here and how it was all supposed to work.

I've been working my way back and forth. This is what the pages laugh at me for, but I've now managed to cover three desks with reference papers because I'm going back and forth between the original land stewardship bill, the Municipal Government Act, the amending act that we have here, and a number of other notes and reports that have been produced on this bill. I end up a taking up a lot of space, and I apologize to my colleagues for that, but it's not easy to track this stuff. You really are going back and forth between all of these. Really, I do legislation for a living, so I have a better sense of how to do this. I can't imagine being someone out in the community trying to put this one together and follow it. It doesn't surprise me that people have been flooding into information sessions that have been offered in certain areas of Alberta to try and get information on how this works.

Again, I see a downloading of certain processes or expectations or requirements that municipalities take and carry through on directives from the provincial government – also a philosophy that we see a great deal of from this administration – and a continuing drive to development. I'm thinking back to when the Athabasca advisory committee report on the land-use framework for that area was released. That was just stage 1. The advisory committee made recommendations about how the land-use plan for that area should start to look. I remember the minister defending, you know, that a whole 20 per cent of the land was going to be held aside for conservation, and wouldn't we be thrilled, to which I immediately thought: that opens up 80 per cent of it for development.

That's a discussion that we haven't really had as a public in Alberta. We have so much land here for not very many people, a

huge amount of land, but we've also never discussed how we think it's appropriate to go ahead and divide that up. Should we open 80 per cent of it up to development? That doesn't mean that there will be somebody living on every square inch. Through my snowmobiling encounters I've been able to travel a lot of Alberta and a lot of land that is off the beaten track, off highway 2. I'll tell you that I can get a long way into places where I couldn't have gotten 30 and 40 years ago because of the seismic lines that were put in to find where the best places were to put a wellhead and to drill exploration wells.

Mr. MacDonald: What's the horsepower on your sled?

Ms Blakeman: About 500.

Mr. Denis: Not horsepower; 500 CCs.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, 500 CCs. Oh, sorry; not horsepower. Oh, boy. No, no. You guys get me off track here.

The point is that I can get a long way into what I think should have been fairly pristine land. The development that has gone on has opened up all of Alberta. If you look at it from space, we're a pincushion. We're absolutely latticed with lines that cut into our public land and give access to humans to get into that space, which is going to affect the wildlife.

The other significant observation, the other significant part of this bill, is that for the first time I really saw this administration tangle with rural property owners in a major way, and I can't say that the government came out of it unbruised. I think they actually got roughed up quite a bit. Ultimately, what I am seeing as this debate progresses on how this act has been adjusted continues to be a wrangle between the current administration and my colleagues to the ideological right, which are essentially the conservative elites – let me call it that – on the land-use regional plans and sort of agreeing and setting out how land will be used in the future.

What I want to do is just go over a couple of the points of concern that came to my attention that I think have not been addressed. I'm not going to go into the details because that's not appropriate in second reading, but I notice that there is a requirement that regional plans or amendments be tabled in the Legislature. My question is: will this be debatable as a concurrence motion? Are these just being tabled in the Legislature for information purposes, or are they being tabled in the Legislature for concurrence, for us to agree to that change of the land-use plan? I think that's very important, particularly when we get back to my points later on about the Henry VIII clauses. There's one question for the minister to answer, and it specifically appears on the bill on page 3, amending section 5.

On page 7 section 12, which amends section 15, allows title holders to apply for the variance in respect of restrictions that have been put on. The minister was just talking about this at the end of his remarks. That and a section towards the end make me think how much resource is going to be necessary with the request to review the regional plan.

You know, I have a lot of experience with municipal variances because I live in a neighbourhood that completely came under a redevelopment plan by the city, and 75 per cent of the neighbourhood was redone. A lot of changes. I lived through this for 10 years, and honestly on some days I got three variance notifications in my mailbox, so I'm very familiar with this. In the city there is a development appeal board, so those variances can end up in front of that, but I don't see what the administrative process here is around the variances. Someone applies for a variance, but what if

somebody else doesn't want you to have it? Is there notification for other people?

If you've got a land-use plan and someone applies for a variance on it, that's going to have consequences down the line. Who manages and foresees those consequences? Who is the decision-maker about whether that variance is going to be granted and allowing anybody else to have their say on that, or is this just cut off at a certain point? You can apply for your variance. Nobody else has anything to say about it, and either they grant it or they don't. So that's the second question that I have.

4:40

Section 14, which is amending section 19 of the act, was the one where the burden was put on the landowner to apply for compensation within a specific period of time. By going back and forth, I was able to answer my own question there, which is: how did they get notification that this was going to happen? There is another section that actually deals with the notification. They don't just have to be constantly monitoring the *Alberta Gazette*, which, I'm sure, we all do every day. No, we don't, obviously. There was an official notification section to landowners that something would happen with the regional plan or would happen with their property so that they would know and be able to deal with that. So I answered one of my own questions there.

An Hon. Member: That's efficient.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, I know.

I'm also curious that there was no change to section 20. I'm pretty sure that section 20 was one of the ones that was being talked about as a Henry VIII clause, in which the minister or the cabinet is able to change legislation without coming back to the House. At the time the government defended these clauses very strongly, and I argued against them, and I still am. You know, as much as this place has been diminished, it's a bit of an echo chamber today, so I suppose that's proving my point. There's a lot of legislation now that can be dealt with by the minister away from this Chamber, and we never know about it unless we're reading the *Alberta Gazette*.

I don't see that there was a change in section 20 from the main bill, and I also question what was going on in section 19.

Mr. Knight: You have to look at section 21 as well when you're looking at section 20. All that's suggesting, of course, is that for all decision-making, municipal and provincial decision-making, the same rule applies.

Ms Blakeman: The minister is coaching me on the side that if I look at section 21, I will find out that everybody is treated the same, but I don't think that's quite answering my question.

When I look under – sorry; I have to go backwards and find out where I started here – section 14, which is changing section 19 of the original bill, by the time you get down to the bottom of page 10 in the paper bill, it's talking about, again, 19.1(10), that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is cabinet, may make regulations – that's regulations – “respecting the form and manner of making applications to the Crown, the Compensation Board or the Court of Queen's Bench under this section.” I don't like it, but I understand what that's about. Then it talks about “respecting the application or modification of Part 3, Division 3, and the regulations made under that Division, in respect of applications to the Compensation Board or the Court of Queen's Bench under this section.”

Part 3, division 3, of the main bill is that compensation section. The whole thing is conservation directives. That says that this can be changed without coming back here because it's empowering

cabinet to change that part 3, division 3. I'm still questioning that, so I'd like to hear the minister talk about that one.

Now, what I would expect to see, what I would hope to see from this bill, what the Official Opposition really wanted to see, was a fair and transparent expropriation process. First of all, it needs to be a transparent process for determining the need of a given project, and this is referencing other bills that have come through at the same time, in particular the big electrical one.

An Hon. Member: Bill 50.

Ms Blakeman: Bill 50.

There does need to be a transparent process about the need for something. If the government, you know, believes that it's right to proceed with that, then it shouldn't be worried about a process in which it explains itself to the public. So demonstrating the need; two, the transparent expropriation process; three, a fair compensation process; and four, a clear appeals process. You always have to have an appeals process built in. Any of us that work in our constituency offices are often dealing with that appeals process that's built into almost everything that we have in provincial government rule. So with this bill in my portfolio, that's what I as critic for Sustainable Resource Development wanted to see out of this. I'm not entirely convinced that that's what we got.

The whole issue of a land-use framework and the ability to make that plan is critically important, and trying to get that concept of public good is really important. When I talk to my constituents in downtown Edmonton, they say to me: “What? Land use? What are you talking about? I don't know it. What is this stuff?” It's true that for many urban dwellers this stuff doesn't touch their lives. But you talk about public good, you know: are my people interested in a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary? Now their eyes light up. Yes. Now they get it. When you say that the government would need to be able to assemble the land in order for that track to run on it – okay? – now they've got it. When you say, “We're talking about not having urban sprawl decimate agricultural land,” that's about the plan.

Those are some of the questions I'd like the minister to answer. I look forward to continued debate.

The Deputy Speaker: From my list here the next hon. member I recognize is the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 10, the Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011. The amendments in this act explicitly protect and enshrine landowner rights and make them front and centre in Alberta's land-use planning. The freedom to own and enjoy private property is a fundamental right that Albertans have had since Alberta became a province.

I would like to speak today on the importance of land-use planning in the protection of property rights. Mr. Speaker, the connection that Albertans have with the land is something that this government respects and will always protect. Land is unlike any other asset on a number of grounds. Every parcel is unique, it is fixed in place, it is finite in quantity, it will outlast any of its possessors, and it is necessary for virtually every human activity.

As a landowner myself my own family's livelihood has been dependent on the land for generations. As a rancher property rights are not only fundamental to my way of life but to all Albertans. This is why I strongly support the land-use framework and Bill 10, which will enhance the rights of rural landowners.

Mr. Speaker, the necessity of land-use planning is essential for Alberta's future prosperity. With 5 million people projected to reside in Alberta within the next 10 to 20 years, it is of paramount

importance that we have planning legislation in place that will coordinate in an organized fashion the goals and objectives of Albertans. It should be Albertans, not the courts or foreign environmental groups, that provide input and decide on Alberta's future.

While some in opposition suggest they would rather have land-use decisions decided in the courts, I believe Albertans know what is at stake and that Albertans should have the final say on land-use planning. So I have to ask myself: what is behind the motives of the opposition when they throw out wild accusations about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, or ALSA? I've had friends call me up and ask questions like: "Why did the government pass legislation that will take away my land? Why did the government pass legislation that will turn Alberta into a Soviet-style communist state?" There are many other wild accusations that are so far out there, it's almost laughable. All I can guess is that they are telegraphing their innermost thoughts to Albertans on how they would use such legislation if they were ever in power.

4:50

However, Alberta's future is a very serious matter. We need to get it right, and, Mr. Speaker, we have got it right. Bill 10 will make it absolutely clear that ALSA must respect the rights of individual property holders, that Albertans will continue to have a right to compensation, and that public consultation and transparency in the development of regional plans will be required.

These amendments make it so plain that this government supports landowner rights and their right to compensation that even the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere should be clear on the matter. Once a supporter of property rights, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere previously stated about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act that "at first glance much of this legislation may be interpreted as a regression on property rights, but it would be a very large mistake to think so as this bill, in my view, does the exact opposite. It strengthens landowner rights." He also stated that the former Bill 36 "is an unprecedented victory for the rights of landowners in this province." Mr. Speaker, the member's analysis of this legislation was as correct then as it is today. Albertans who earn their living from the land know how important land-use planning is for their livelihoods.

Long-time rancher Harvey Buckley recently stated to the *Cochrane Eagle* that "ALSA is the best piece of legislation this province has done in 60 years" and that "it does not infringe on your property rights."

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is a direct correlation between land-use planning and property rights. Albertans enjoy their property entirely based on previous land-use initiatives. To see this, we can go back all the way to the pioneers that settled our land in accordance with the Dominion Lands Act. The Dominion Lands Act encouraged the orderly settlement of western Canada, which included numerous land-use regulations. For example, prospective landowners were required to be at least 21 years old. They were required to occupy the land for a set period of time, to build improvements on the land, and to cultivate a portion of the land, usually around 30 acres.

The Dominion Lands Act also set out how land should be divided; for example, into townships each containing 36 sections and for each section to be divided into quarter sections. It provided for public road allowances every mile by two miles to enable the travel and transportation of people and produce with minimal use of private land.

Mr. Speaker, these were land-use initiatives needed at that time to establish private property. It was through this planning process that Albertans gained proprietary interest in property. This is be-

cause the value of property comes largely from factors that are beyond one's property line. External qualities like infrastructure improvements, road access, water quality, and views are examples of external elements which can quantify the value of property. That is why I would suggest that property rights go beyond the four quadrants of a piece of real estate in that effective land-use planning as provided in ALSA would strengthen property rights, not diminish them. Essentially, proper land-use planning is an effective method to optimize property values of landowners.

However, there are also rights protecting what lies within your property, which is why it is essential that any land-use plan find an acceptable balance respecting both public and private property rights. That is why fair compensation is a key element of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and Bill 10 makes this abundantly clear.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a long-time friend of mine, Mr. Neil Wilson, the immediate past president of the Alberta property rights initiative, who stated last week on CBC radio in relation to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act that if in any way proprietary interest is diminished, compensation should be available. When asked if ALSA achieves that, he replied: I think this government has tried its very best to take legislation in the interest of public and make it compensatory, certainly.

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act creatively found a balance which protects and enhances both external and internal property rights, and Bill 10 makes this even clearer. Albertans have told us they want leadership in provincial planning, and I believe that our economy is dependent upon ensuring we have the proper land-use plans in place. Property rights, economic growth in Alberta's future are all tied together in this important piece of legislation. We need to ensure investors that their rights are protected, and this bill does that. We need to ensure property owners that their property rights, whether it be surface, subsurface, or public, are respected, and this bill does that. We also need to assure Albertans that our province will continue to be a beacon of prosperity, freedom, and democracy, and I believe Bill 10 is a shining example of this Alberta tradition.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 10, the Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011, and I would suggest all members stand in support of this legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he can clarify comments which he attributed the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I was shocked, frankly – shocked – to hear those comments, and I would like it if he would please identify his source.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, hon. member. I would clearly identify the source. It is *Hansard*, May 13, 2009.

An Hon. Member: Say it isn't so.

Mr. Berger: It's so. It's a page and a half, pages 1137 through to 1138, if that clarifies that for you. It's quite a lengthy speech on that.

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

Mr. Boutillier: Yes. To follow up on the question to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on the comments that were made, I have not met anyone more knowledgeable in terms of

property rights than the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. It's clear to me that the understanding of the hon. member is something that he needs to review because, quite simply, what was said in *Hansard* is not the rest of the story.

Clearly, the Wildrose caucus supports the infinite rights of landowners. In fact, in some recent town hall meetings in many of your constituencies I understood that a gentleman by the name of Keith Wilson had presented some very, very interesting facts impartially, Mr. Speaker. I'd be really interested in the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod – he heard the comments that were made. In fact, it's my understanding that the Minister of SRD invited Mr. Wilson to meet with him, and I understand he had a very clear understanding of the facts. I'd be really interested: is he saying that what Mr. Wilson is saying is not accurate relative to the issue of the assault on property rights of Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I kind of got lost in the preamble there, but I think what he was really asking is: was this the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's actual speech? I would submit it, table it, if he would like or give you copies. There are lots of them.

Mr. Boutilier: Keith Wilson is what I'm asking about now.

5:00

Mr. Berger: Mr. Wilson's comments at those meetings: I would like to comment that it would be nice if he would put the whole line of the act in when he quotes a line. Dot, dot, dot doesn't really extend to the content of it.

To go a little further on that whole issue here, when we go through this, there was a point here where the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had claimed that he was given a speech to read. I think he also claimed something similar to the 1974 or '75 abduction of Patty Hearst, where she'd been kidnapped, and then she went and robbed a bank and just acted like her kidnappers. So that was why he read this speech, because he had been kidnapped by our party and then read this speech.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to submit that when you go through the content of this speech, the content of this speech has a lot of local content on the area of Airdrie-Chestermere, and I think the member did a wonderful job of putting forward his points in this exact speech and on the members of his community that he brought up and talked about freely here. He quoted Doc Seaman's generous donation of conservation easements on the OH Ranch. He spoke of a fellow here, Jim Hole, who would have really liked this legislation because it would have enabled him to continue on with his operation and gain some value out of it without actually selling it. And it goes on for the next page, basically discussing these different things.

I think the member, being a trained legal fellow, four years of postsecondary, three years of legal training, knew what he was reading here and was very impressed with it. I have to say that that was one legal opinion, now we have another legal opinion, and I'm sure we'll have more legal opinions to come forward. But I have to say that I think he was bang on on this one. He did a wonderful job of conveying it. Now I'm surprised that he's not in here this afternoon to discuss it further.

Mr. Boutilier: Excuse me. Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You should not mention the presence or absence of a member.

Mr. Berger: Oh, okay. I apologize. Point well taken. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The point of order has been retracted. He has apologized for that.

On my list here, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Do you wish to speak?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 10. I think that some context is valuable here, and I think also some history is valuable here. The context of this is the fact that there is widespread discontent in the province, in rural areas in particular, with a suite of Tory legislation, and that's not just Bill 36, but it is also Bill 19, and it is also Bill 50. The three of them have to be taken together, in my view, in order to get the entire picture of what this government is actually attempting to do.

Some of the history is attempts to site a north-south transmission line in this province a few years ago which fell afoul of landowners in rural Alberta, particularly in the Rimbey area where a group of landowners got together and actively challenged what was actually being proposed. The whole process was compromised when the ERCB was caught spying on this group. That created quite a firestorm of conflict. So the government decided that they were going to basically legislate a sledgehammer in order to crush the flea that had thwarted their attempts. But it wouldn't have been thwarted had there been more openness about the proposal and if the ERCB had not resorted to illegal tactics in its attempt to overcome opposition. Keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, the ERCB is supposed to be a neutral body that adjudicates these sorts of things and does not take sides or advocate one side or the other. So it was kind of a dark day, I think, in terms of privacy and basic civil rights of Alberta citizens.

The government, having gone ahead with its deregulation of electricity in the area of transmission, decided that a massive set of projects was required. Now, we have about \$2 billion worth of infrastructure for transmission currently in the province, and it serves the province well and has for a long time. It's getting older, but it's by no means going to fall apart. The government wants to initiate a whole series of new projects that would be worth \$16 billion when you add everything in; in other words, an eightfold increase in value over what we have today.

No adequate explanation has ever been provided for this massive increase in transmission infrastructure. But the one explanation that presents itself is that they want to create a huge market for the buying and selling of electricity, the generation of electricity in Alberta for export purposes to the United States because domestic consumption cannot explain the massive scale of infrastructure that's being proposed.

In order to ram this through, the government passed a series of laws to give them the power that they needed to do this. I know that Bill 36, which this is supposed to amend, gave the cabinet a huge amount of power. It gave them overwhelming control over every aspect of regional plans, and it doesn't reflect the land-use framework's commitment to public input and community involvement. The government can create regional plans, regional advisory councils, and so on.

I think that you also have to take a look at Bill 19, which preceded it, and that allows for an area of land to be designated as a land assembly project. The minister has to publish a plan of the project to create a project area, but once it has been declared, the cabinet can make regulation about how that land can be used, developed, or occupied. Some amendments were made to that legislation, but it gives an enormous amount of power to the cabinet in order to essentially designate any land that they wish and to

control any sort of development on that in a long-term sense. So if they are going to build a project 10 years down the road, they can effectively sterilize that land.

So Bill 19 was a key piece of this. With Bill 36, again the same thing. Bill 50 took away the authority from the Alberta Utilities Commission, the power to approve the need for transmission lines. It eliminates that the public interest needs to be shown before the project is approved, and it is paving the way for the construction of this massive infrastructure for transmission for profit, all of which, by the way, will now be paid for by all electricity consumers in the province. These pieces of legislation need to be taken together as a way of taking away traditional rights of landowners and taking away regulatory oversight of major projects in our electrical system in this province. That is really, I think, what has to be seen.

Now, it is true that some members of the Wildrose caucus, who were then members of the Progressive Conservative caucus, did support these bills. We made a motion, for example, to try and stop Bill 50, and that was opposed as well. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the role that the NDP played as the only party at the time leading the fight against these three bills and trying to connect the bills to the root source of this problem, which is electricity deregulation, which has created a situation where in order to allow big electricity companies to make more profits, the very ratepayers who are supposed to be served by them are going to be shaken down dramatically to pay for all of this unnecessary infrastructure.

5:10

It's interesting that in recent weeks the Minister of Infrastructure has gone on the record in his community newspaper indicating that some of this infrastructure is required in order to facilitate the development of nuclear power in our province. That is a startling admission which flies in the face of other statements that we've had from the government.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate one more point, and that is the distinction between the position of the NDP on this legislation and the present position of the Wildrose Alliance. Both parties are opposing these pieces of legislation, but the Wildrose Alliance is taking the position of property rights as an absolute, and that's not the position that we take. They would like to protect property rights absolutely, and we would like to protect the public interest.

Where we draw the line with the government is that we think you should never be able to take peoples' property unless there's an urgent public necessity to do so, there is full consultation, and there is full and adequate compensation. These bills violated those principles, and that's why we were so strongly not in favour of them. There is a risk that in the reaction against these bills that the government has created, there may actually be changes that take away the legitimate role of land-use planning by municipalities and by the provincial government, so it's important to us that the ability to plan land use and the ability of the public interest to trump property rights when that's necessary should be retained. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, as do our friends in the Wildrose Alliance.

The point that I think is most important is that there is a drive towards centralizing power that's inherent in each of these pieces of legislation that I find very disturbing. In other words, the government has decided that because of some problems down the road, largely of its own making and of the ERCB's own making, they're going to abandon the democratic process when it comes to approval of these projects and push ahead with centralized decision-making, and that goes too far in our view. For those reasons I think we are going to draw the line here.

Bill 10 does not remove all of the egregious elements of Bill 36, and I think that it's certainly insufficient as far as I can see. For example, the minister will be able to issue directives to the stewardship commissioner and staff. The minister will still maintain, in our view, an undue amount of political control in the regional plan process, in their implementations. Some of the changes are cosmetic. It replaces the word "extinguish" with "rescind" in reference to statutory consent in section 8. Instead of saying, "No person has a right to compensation by reason of this Act" and then listing the exceptions to the rule, the act will now state, "A person has a right to compensation by reason of this Act" and then list the avenues available for compensation.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the bill fails to adequately address the problems in Bill 36, and it certainly does nothing to address the significant problems that the other two companion pieces of legislation provide: overriding the rights of property owners, overriding proper regulatory oversight of the construction of major infrastructure projects that would be paid for by ratepayers.

For those reasons we cannot support the bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened intently to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I have a couple of clarification questions, I guess, that I'd like to ask him. He made reference to the Wildrose several times, wanting to make distinctions. I do not believe that at any time the Wildrose has ever said that the Expropriation Act isn't valid or shouldn't be in place. There is actually a long tradition since, you know, the BNA Act where expropriation can and should be allowed for public good. What we have been referring to over and over again and have declared is that we need to entrench property rights in the Constitution because if those were in fact entrenched in the Constitution, bills 19, 36, and 50 could have been challenged in the courts. Again, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod says: oh, we don't ever want to be in the courts. This certainly sounds like a monarchy, that they will control the courts.

I guess I would take issue and ask for your clarification on why you feel that we do not think the Expropriation Act is applicable in developing, whether it's power lines, pipelines, roads, transportation, and in having that process if, in fact, someone has been challenged by the government.

You've eloquently talked about Bill 50 and how they can push these power lines through, and it's not in the public good. In the old act, where they had to have proof of need, that was critical. Now, like I say, with Bill 50 they've wiped that aside and said: "Oh, no. This is essential." Again, it's a policy that the government has put out, thereby not allowing us to challenge it in the courts because they can just dictate it. It's a government policy. It goes forward.

Perhaps you could clarify why you feel that we do not think the public good is ever addressed through the Expropriation Act and that property rights are paramount, and therefore there would be an absolute juggernaut of any movement forward.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I'm surprised that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore would want us to be making legislation in the courts. I didn't think that was a conservative principle.

I think that entrenching property rights in the Constitution really takes away the ability of elected bodies to make decisions about what the public good is. I think these bills stink, but I think that it is a democratic issue, not a legal issue, to determine property rights. So as much as I dislike these bills and oppose them, I don't want our laws fixed by court decisions with entrenched property rights. That's really the difference between us.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I appreciate this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. This series of acts or bills that we have dealt with over the last number of years certainly has called into question the province's land-use plans. If you are not satisfied with the amendments to this legislation as proposed in Bill 10, what further changes would you like to see to make it more contemporary and – I don't know what the word would be – to make it more appealing to the New Democratic Party?

5:20

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

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that regional plans need to be strengthened, especially with respect to environmental protection. There are only a couple of things that it must do here: describe a vision for the region and state one or more objectives for the region. I think that regional plans have to be detailed and specific to be effective, so I'm not sure that the legislation really deals with that.

I think that we need to take away more control from the minister, and I think that we need to have more direct community control.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The Committee of the Whole shall now continue.

Bill 9 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011 (continued)

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's with a great deal of disappointment that I rise at this point to speak now to the supplemental supply estimates. This government seems to take great glory in jumping back and forth and switching the game. You put on all of your hockey equipment, get ready to play, and then they want to go out and play football or something else.

It's simple for them because they have multiple members, and they are able to just have a new person step up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out when we were talking about Bill 10 how she had three desks covered with material to try and address the situation. Unfortunately, I only have two desks in front

of me, so I use the floor as well to try and prepare. Now the government, though, is switching back and saying: oh, no; we need to go back to supplemental supply.

They seem to take pleasure in trying to cause as much confusion and problems as possible, which, again, is very disappointing, that they cannot communicate and extend a little bit of courtesy as we discuss the various bills that are coming forward. They sit over there with smirks on their faces and think: oh, this is a wonderful democratic process. Like I say, I'm somewhat dismayed at their behaviour. [interjections] Now we'll have some chatter from the backbench, former ministers that are no longer allowed to sit on the front bench. I guess they chattered too much in caucus and cabinet, so they got booted out. I don't know. They have quite the disciplinary process over there that, again, I don't understand.

But we'll continue on. Supplemental supply. It's interesting that the minister got up and spoke eloquently about how this is the smallest supplemental supply that they've needed in years. When you look at the other half of it, this is the biggest budget, the biggest deficit that they've had in years. So they're saying, "Actually, we came in very, very close." – I believe the number he used earlier was \$4.8 billion, and – "Aren't we grand to be able to run such a fiscally responsible ship?" The fact of the matter is that this ship is heavily overburdened, and it's sinking. It's got problems. It's not fiscally sound. Again, because it's carrying a \$4.8 billion deficit, what's the future of this going forward?

It somewhat reminds me of the famous Stanford marshmallow experiment back in the 1960s, Mr. Chair. At that point they brought in three-year-olds and put them in a room and put a marshmallow in front of them. First, they'd ask them, "Would you like the marshmallow?" Of course, those children at that point were thrilled with the marshmallow. Then they'd say: "If you wait 10 minutes, we will give you a second marshmallow. But we need to excuse ourselves. We'll be back in 10 minutes. When we get back, if the marshmallow is still there, we'll reward you with a second marshmallow." It's interesting that at the young age of three years I believe it was 20 or 30 per cent of those children were able to have the discipline and the understanding to say, "I will wait because I will have twice as much in 10 minutes." As they followed those individuals through life, they realized how successful those people were because they had the discipline and the ability to think forward and wait to get that reward.

What this is relevant to, Mr. Chair, is the fact that this government was exceedingly lucky to have some real lottery winnings from 2005 to 2008. It's kind of interesting because when you talk to financial advisers, they say that when someone all of a sudden comes upon a big windfall, if they don't talk and collaborate with the right individuals, they will in all likelihood lose that windfall. In a very short period, between one to three years, that money will evaporate, and they will not know or be able to show where it went. They'll be fiscally irresponsible.

That's exactly the situation we're in, Mr. Chair, with this supplemental supply. We're only the second year in. We're going to burn over two-thirds, perhaps three-quarters, of what I call the political slush fund, the lottery winnings. This government didn't have the discipline to look at: "How do we spread this out? How do we ensure that we get good value for our dollar?" They've gone out and frivolously spent it on many projects that are not necessary or for the fact that they couldn't say: "You know, if we just extend this over four or five years, what's the value that we could do? Are these projects sustainable?"

What I'm speaking about, Mr. Chair, is exactly the situation we're in with the infrastructure building that's gone on in this province. In 2003 the infrastructure budget was cut in half, and it was devastating to the industry. We were running about \$3 billion

a year at that time. It was cut in half, to \$1.5 billion. The capacity of the industry was literally destroyed. But worse than that, the confidence of the building industry in this government has never been the same since because of the yo-yo effect of this government spending great amounts of money because they have it in their pocket, saying, "You must spend this within 18 months; you must spend it on this infrastructure," with no thought about down the road 10 years or 15 years. It's just, "Well, what do we need to do to retain power and to be able to buy as many votes as possible for the next election?"

Once again we're here addressing the supplemental supply because of this government's inability to come within budget and function for even a single year. They're caught in the problem of overspending, expenses, always these unforeseen disasters that hit, and there's never any planning in place to look after that.

We need to go back and look exactly at the supplemental supply. Like I said, I've got to dig it out from my Bill 10 notes now, that we've got to throw over top. It's just disappointing that in such a year as this, with such a huge deficit, that you wouldn't think we could stay within the budget that was set out. They've been doing this for 40 years. You'd think they'd have a little bit of experience and understanding that you need to plan for these things, these problems that arise. But, no, they failed to do that, so once again we're doing supplemental supply.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity referred to the three budgets that we're going to have to debate here, with interim supply coming up. Again, this is another failure of this government. They promised that they'd actually come in and present the budget early so that we wouldn't have to go into interim supply, to be more efficient. But do they do that? No. They don't ever seem to comprehend their own words or be willing to follow through with them in order to say: "You know, we're going to be fiscally responsible. We're going to be prudent with the taxpayers' money. We're going to invest wisely."

5:30

Zippping back here again to the infrastructure and the building that's going on, in question period it's very difficult under a 35-second rule to be able to expound a little bit, so I want to talk a little bit more about the problems that we see with the huge spending on infrastructure and the wall that we're going to hit. Interim funding, supplemental supply: there isn't going to be anything that this government can pull out. There's certainly not going to be any sustainability fund where they can go and say: we need to continue this.

What I'm referring to, Mr. Chair, is that consistency of planning and understanding what's going forward. If we understand those things, we can remain and come in under budget and not have to go through the problems of addressing supplemental supply. But at this current rate of \$6.1 billion in infrastructure this year, how much longer can they continue that sustainability? If they've created that capacity in the industry here, in two years we're going to have to shrink down to perhaps \$3 billion, \$2 billion if we're going to actually balance the budget. We have this huge yo-yo effect, then. Once again, back prior to 2003, when this government had a little bit of consistency, industry knew that they were going to, you know, spend about \$2.5 billion, \$2.7 billion, \$2.8 billion, \$3 billion, and they actually built the capacity. They looked at paying off their equipment over a five-year period and realized that not all of this equipment will last that time.

When the drastic cuts came and then the huge spending in 2005-06, with them wanting to spend I can't remember whether it was \$7 billion or \$8 billion, most of those businesses looked at it and put bids in to say, "Well, we'll go buy the equipment, but because

this isn't sustainable" – they've had a lucrative year this year, but who knows if they're going to win the lottery this year? – "we'll bid at a price to make sure we pay for our equipment in this year." The building industry has never been the same since that because of the erratic behaviour of this government.

I just have to say how disappointed I am that after 40 years this government is not capable of coming in under budget. Even in the biggest deficit ever in this province's history – the government is saying \$4.8 billion, but really it's closer to \$7 billion when it looks to revenue versus expenses – they're taking this huge amount of money out of, supposedly, a sustainability fund and using it for infrastructure building saying, "Oh, now is a great time," and it would have been a great time had we had triple or quadruple that money in there and they were having the gradual expenses.

But these great times are going to come to a sudden halt. In two years, when that sustainability money is gone, then what is the government going to say? "Oh, this is a great time to borrow money and to continue building infrastructure." That's what I see them doing. Or they're going to face the realities of an election before that budget, and Albertans can send them on their way. They certainly deserve to be sent home, saying, "You're irresponsible and not able to budget properly" and, more importantly, "Your priorities are very poor."

We've had a few members talk. I believe the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, if my memory reminds me properly, talked about the importance of, you know, seniors, community services, and how they took the money away early in the budget only to find that they couldn't meet that, and now they're having to return that budget to Children and Youth Services. It's very discouraging, this yo-yo effect. Again, what are they going to do to these different government services going into this next year? They're going to immediately retract what they've been given. They make the announcements; they make the retraction.

It is very frustrating for these front-line workers, for these managers, that are trying to do the best they can with the dollars, being promised this, only to have it rescinded. Again they say, "Well, here it is in supplemental supply" at the end. This government just doesn't seem to understand the importance of consistency, of budgeting long term, not one year.

Yet they've supposedly caught that vision with Alberta Health, saying: oh, this is going to be consistent funding over the next five years. Well, why has it taken so long, with us having gotten into such a disaster, before they say in one area, "Here's the five-year funding" whereas they refuse to do it in other areas? Yet they promise and say: "Don't you worry. We're there. We signed a five-year contract with the teachers." They're no sooner into that contract than they're wanting to fight with them or to say: well, please give it back.

They certainly don't give back their raises. They takes three steps forward and say: "Oh, well, we'll stop here. Okay. Well, we'll take a quarter of a step back. Aren't we wonderful now?" Again, it's just disappointing to the Alberta taxpayers. They're so frustrated with the spending, the priorities of this government.

Again, it's been brought up by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere about the federal building. We're not saying not to ever do it, but what we're saying is that the priorities were well known in advance, and if we had an actual list of what's coming down the chute, not what's actually been announced, we could do a lot better in prioritizing properly and listening to Albertans on what they want. The money that's being spent on that federal building could have easily been budgeted two or three years down the way. We were well into the eye of this economic storm before that started. They could have said: "You know, we're not going to go forward on this. We're going to prioritize seniors' care facili-

ties. We're going to prioritize schools." Yes, they're putting in some, but they're not putting in enough.

The President of the Treasury Board said that we need balance. I think a toddler has better balance than this provincial government when it comes to balancing the budget. The bottom line is that it's not just balance; it's priorities. It's being able to look down the road and realize that, you know, this isn't over in 2012 or 2013. The province needs to continue. Infrastructure is going to need to continue. Are we going to be there? Are we going to do what the government needs to do to ensure that the funding is there, that we have a competitive industry that understands the viability, knows what's coming down?

Again, we've got this supplementary supply. Why doesn't the government come out with some more details? Let's have the details. Let's have a public, prioritized list of infrastructure. When the deficit is growing like this, we could shrink back and say, "We're only going to spend \$4.1 billion on infrastructure this year" and then see where the bidding goes and how many projects we can do.

Mr. Chair, I have to say that I am very disappointed that we have to spend the time going through supplemental supply, even more disappointed that this government jumps back and forth while we're in the House here rather than allowing the discussion to continue with one specific bill. It's quite amazing to look at this and to realize that they cannot even budget for one year. I just have to be disappointed overall that we're spending this time on supplemental supply.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll sit down and listen to other members. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry I was away earlier. I was interviewing a fantastic candidate for the riding of Livingstone-Macleod, and I unfortunately couldn't make it. We'll make sure that I'm here a little bit more often. He's a doozy. You'll love this one. Anyway, we'll leave that till 2012 along with a few others.

I'd like to comment on the supplementary supply bill. In particular – honestly, I'm not going to mince words – this government talks about balance and finding the right balance. They've got about as much balance as a drunk. I mean, they wouldn't know balance if it was, you know, flashed right in front of them, if their life depended on it, and indeed it does at this point.

It's just something else when we're listening to the tripe that was expressed yesterday by the Member for Edmonton-Calder with regard to the federal building. I got a couple of e-mails from some folks who had watched question period and watched that member's statement. They're just amazed that it actually hasn't occurred to this government yet that spending \$275 million on new offices for bureaucrats and MLAs with, I might add, interactive water features, an ecozone, an agrizone, a skating rink, a new plaza . . . [interjection] I know. The interactive water features, Member: maybe we'll have to wear our swimsuits to work. I don't know.

The point is the fact that they can't see that it is so clearly not a priority for Albertans. The interactive water feature in the federal building somehow was a higher priority than new schools, than long-term care, than balancing the budget.

5:40

That's the whole problem with this government. They keep saying: "Where would you cut? What would you do? What would you do differently?" Then you tell them: "Let's have the list. Give us the order of projects that you have. Give us the list of projects

that you feel are important for Alberta, and give us the criteria that you used to arrive at those projects, and then we'll have a debate. We'll talk about what stuff can wait an extra year. We'll have that debate." That's a good debate to have so that we can balance our budget and get our province back on the road to prosperity. Yet all they can do is go back to the same tried and trusted method that they always use, which is to fearmonger, to spin half-truths and entire mistruths, to personally attack.

It's amazing. You know, it just doesn't make any sense to me that a government that is elected to serve the people can be so out of touch with reality that they would actually think that the renovations to the federal building, including skating rinks and interactive water features, are somehow more important than seniors and long-term care and schools for kids and balancing the budget, for that matter, all three.

The problem people have with this government is that they have not been able to prioritize. They are a Seinfeld government; they are a government about nothing that stands for nothing. There are individuals in that government that do stand for things and do have principles, but as a whole they don't stand for anything. I mean, the term "Progressive Conservative" is an oxymoron in and of itself, but aside from that, there's just no grounding that they have with regard to what they're doing, what the plan is other than to spend as much as you can to satisfy as many people as possible. You know, it just blows my mind away that that's the limit of their vision and imagination.

Obviously, as a Wildrose government we would have looked very carefully and would have clearly said that that federal building along with carbon capture and storage and many of the other boondoggles and waste that this government has come up with over the last several years – we would clearly put those projects off. We would delay them, and we would focus on the priorities of Albertans, which are, for example, long-term care so that we can unclog our hospital beds, schools for our kids so that we can educate the next generation of Alberta entrepreneurs and health professionals and scientists and artists and all the talent that we have.

Anyway, the biggest failing of this government – and it's reflected in this bill – is just a complete lack of ability to prioritize needs before wants. Ultimately, that will be their undoing because as we saw with Paul Martin federally, as we see with other politicians throughout time, anybody whose priority is everything, stands for nothing. That's the problem with this government. They don't know what they stand for other than satisfying the whims of every possible special-interest group under the sun. [interjections] That's right. There you go.

Anyway, I hope that this government will find it in their minds at some point to realize: "You know what? The people of Alberta want to see what their priorities are." They want to see the list top to bottom so that we can have this debate. I'd like to know from the members opposite: what did the federal building beat out? What long-term care facility did that \$275 million beat out? What school did it beat out? What on that priority list got left behind because of the blinking \$275 million federal building? Until they answer that, they don't have a leg to stand on.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, but pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the chair must now put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill referred to the Committee of the Whole. The question goes: does this committee approve Bill 9, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011?

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 9.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10

Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, clearly, as much as the hon. minister is attempting to do what he believes is the right thing, I think the Expropriation Act has adequate provisions for compensation already. So the question, really, I have to ask is: why are we willing to overrule that? The bill is unnecessary simply because other provinces have rivers, other provinces have industry, other provinces have growth, but other provinces use a balanced approach to managing these things, and that's the difference.

I heard the Member for Livingstone-Macleod earlier. I wish him well with his police college. That's supposed to be coming somewhere down the road, but I'll believe it when I see it.

In my view Bill 10 – I believe that this government always thinks it knows best and views the rights and claims of individuals and local governments more as nuisances than it should in terms of, you know, the inconvenience that they face. So we're here today to speak on behalf of those municipalities.

I might by way of history go back. Back in the earlier years it was said by a very distinguished former cabinet minister here that there are three things you have to do when you're bringing forth the original Bill 36, and that is that if you don't get it right, you have to listen, listen, and listen. What happened was that this bill is essentially amendments to Bill 36 and, really, 12 amendments because this government was not willing to listen to Albertans.

That is where a verdict will be rendered to you and all of us at the next election. If, in fact, you had listened, listened, and listened – I know the members of the Wildrose caucus have listened, the member for the New Democratic Party has listened, members of the Liberal Party sometimes have listened, and the Alberta Party have listened. There are even some members on the other side, especially the one that might have been on the wrong page today, who occasionally listen. But, Mr. Speaker, there's a majority over there who haven't been listening, and the verdict will be rendered to you in the next provincial election.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the minister, whom I call a friend, just simply doesn't understand the magnitude of what is taking place here.

5:50

You've heard me often in this Assembly say that it's an example of the inmates running the asylum. I believe that holds true,

but this is an example of not only running the asylum; you've turned over the keys.

Mr. Speaker, in my judgment, there's an opportunity. I have solutions to what is being proposed here. Rescind it. Repeal Bill 36. Retract, rescind, repeal. I think the option is this: we have an existing infrastructure for the minister already in place. I proudly served as a Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Member for Highwood: I'm glad he's listing to me now. Well, maybe he's not listening, but he's going to have to listen.

The bottom line is that the Municipal Government Act is a governing body with 365 municipalities where we have the infrastructure in place already. We have the infrastructure in place under the Municipal Government Board. There is a board there that actually can arbitrate, that can take a look at regional plans and accomplish what was intended in Bill 36 without violation of the principles of a person's right to own property. There is the Expropriation Act, that has worked very successfully over the last hundred years for Alberta. That is an appropriate measure, but what you have done in this bill is literally taken a maul hammer to something that is so important in terms of the values to Alberta.

For instance, the Water Act. We have under the Environmental Appeals Board today, another ministry that I served under, a very strong Water Act that can protect the value of our water, our blue gold as it's often referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: No, not by me.

Mr. Boutilier: Also the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has mentioned the words "blue gold" often.

Mr. Mason: Just a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a point of order?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: I do, yes. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), language to cause disorder. To suggest that it's me that talks about blue gold flies in the face of reality, hon. member. It's you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, I saw on YouTube a sergeant who talked about blue gold. I might have mistaken who had used that. I do know I've often talked about blue gold, the water. I often have gone forward and said: if you were in a desert and you had a choice between oil and water, I would always accept blue gold as the preferred option. I know the hon. member would agree with me on that point.

The Deputy Speaker: There's a point of order there. You posed a point of order.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order.

Mr. Mason: That would be up to the Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you speak to the point of order?

Mr. Anderson: I absolutely say that I am witness, Mr. Speaker, to this YouTube piece of evidence. Clearly, there was a sergeant on a YouTube video that looked strikingly similar to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and he said blue gold, sir. He talked about blue gold. He admonished this member not to talk

about blue gold. There is no doubt that he has referred to blue gold, and I'll stand by my caucus colleague. There is no point of order, in my opinion, on this, Mr. Speaker. The evidence on YouTube speaks for itself.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this point of order.

Mr. Chase: Yes. On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think it may be hard to get members of other parties to volunteer at future Christmas videos if we bring them back to haunt them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I think we have enough information. I haven't seen the YouTube, so I would say that if the hon. member said that he's not on the YouTube, then I would rule that there's a point of order, that you have to apologize to the member if he's not.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, it is within my humbleness to apologize to the sergeant, who happens to look like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, regarding blue gold. I'm very proud to then be the architect of the words "blue gold." And "mother ship" if I could add as well.

Mr. Mason: Fair enough.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you.

Now we'll continue on the bill.

Debate Continued

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 10, clearly, is a violation of the rights of Albertans when it pertains to property. I think the hon. Minister of SRD perhaps may have listened to too many lawyers. In my mind it is missing the point, to the point where it's lacking the measured approach that this minister has taken before in many other examples.

I actually want to thank the minister. I understand that he invited a very knowledgeable lawyer, who is not with the Justice department, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Keith Wilson, who

has spent his entire career dealing with the issue of property rights. I can say that in the town halls when he explains the issue and the assault on Albertans pertaining to property rights, it is very concerning. I'm sure and I hope the minister would share that same feeling because this is an assault on property rights.

Do the right thing. Repeal the bill. Rescind it. Go back to the principle of listen, listen, and listen. If you table a bill like what was tabled previously, Bill 36 – and here it is now with 12 amendments – something has not gone right. Albertans are not fooled. You've violated the principle of listen, listen, and listen. If a minister cannot get an original bill through with these amendments, even though it might not have been this minister at that time, I sincerely say that the right thing to do would be to rescind the bill and repeal it.

I want to say that Albertans probably would have rewarded you if this government after 40 years had chosen to take that action. But what they did was that they didn't listen, didn't listen, and didn't listen, and now they've come forward with 12 amendments. Mr. Speaker, those 12 amendments: we'll wait until the next election to render the judgment on that.

I can only say today that I do not support Bill 10. I want to say that although this government always thinks that it knows best, I still have faith in some of the members on the other side.

At this time I would say to all members: thank you for being so quiet and listening. I again will apologize to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Whoever his look-alike is, I'll certainly hunt him down. In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's perfectly apparent that the hon. member had not much to say. He stopped with two minutes left before 6 o'clock. He could have added a lot more to the debate in two minutes. In two minutes you can really say a lot. But, obviously, the hon. member didn't wish to. So at two minutes to 6 I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1875