



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 15, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of the First Session of the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Before we proceed, hon. members, there is some significance to this date in the history of the province of Alberta. One hundred and five years ago today, on March 15, 1906, some 4,000 people attended the opening of the First Session of the First Legislature in the history of the province of Alberta. This was at the Thistle rink here in Edmonton.

As its first item of business the new Legislative Assembly elected Charles Wellington Fisher as its first Speaker. Premier Rutherford's speech at the opening of the First Legislature explained that the House would be "laying the foundations of empire in this new land."

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two distinguished visitors that I would like to introduce to you. They're seated in your gallery. I would like to introduce my counterpart from the province of Saskatchewan, the Hon. Dustin Duncan, Minister of Environment, and with him his chief of staff, Cam Baker. I'd ask all members to welcome them.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Red Deer-North it's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you the students of Gateway Christian school. This is an innovative and creative school that looks beyond the classroom to the world. They're here today to observe the Legislature and to observe members here in the House. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North would have liked to be here to make this introduction and hopes that each of our guests enjoys their time at the Legislature. I'd now like to introduce teachers Mr. Jim Driedger, Mrs. Klaaske de Koning, and Ms Sherry Glebe and parent helpers Mrs. Anna Haar and Mrs. Jenni Duke. If I could ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this House a group of very

bright grade 6 students from St. Martha school and their teacher, Shelley LaFontaine. I had an opportunity to have a chat with them. They raised a lot of questions about this Legislature and also about my duty as an MLA. I'd like to ask them to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a delegation from the city of Grande Prairie. They have joined us here today to meet with several ministers to promote the interests of the beautiful city of Grande Prairie. The talented mayor, councillors, and city manager are proud of the strong northern community and are incredibly dedicated to representing the issues of the citizens of this outstanding area of our province.

At this time I would ask the guests to please rise. I am privileged to introduce Mayor Bill Given, Councillor Lorne Radbourne, Councillor Alex Gustafson, Councillor Justin Munroe, Councillor Dan Wong, and Greg Scerbak, the city manager. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky and I would like to thank this hard-working group for visiting the Legislature today. I would ask them to remain standing and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly blessed today because I get to introduce to you and through you a vibrant, beautiful, bright young lady who hails from Widewater, 20 kilometres west of Slave Lake. She has been a principal consultant of Milestone Consulting, in fact, for the last five years now and has worked with and for nonprofit organizations to raise dollars, carry out projects, do research, and write great proposals. She is a third-term councillor with the MD of Lesser Slave River No. 124, and her name is Ms Darcie Acton. She is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that Darcie please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you four very special people from Newthorad Seniors Housing based in Thorhild. The first is Shelly Hanasyk, a third-term councillor of Thorhild county and chair of Newthorad Seniors Housing. You can stand, Shelly. Next are Kevin Grumetza, a fifth-term councillor and deputy reeve, and Julian Topolnisky, an administrator of Newthorad housing. Interestingly, Julian attended school with our Premier. I'm sure he's got a few interesting stories to tell. Finally, Nick Hoffman, who's a loyal and dedicated maintenance worker at Newthorad whom residents very much enjoy visiting with every morning. I'd like to thank them for everything they do for our constituency and invite the Assembly to give them a traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nicholas Ameyaw and Grace Owusu, who are seated in the public gallery. Mr. Ameyaw is the president of the Ghana Friendship Association of Edmonton, and two Saturdays ago they celebrated the 54th year of Ghana Independence Day. The association is very much thankful to the Alberta government for the

\$125,000 in funding for the purchase of their community centre in Edmonton-Mill Woods. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of individuals who you may have visited over the lunch hour today, the Harmony Dialogue Group, who were serving their Noah's pudding in the lower rotunda. Harmony Dialogue Group is a nonprofit organization that focuses on intercultural dialogue promoting unity among all cultural heritages in the city. Each year as a symbol of this unity the Harmony Dialogue Group serves Noah's pudding in public places across Edmonton, giving them an opportunity to interact with their neighbours and strengthen our overall community. I thank the Harmony Dialogue Group for their visit with us here today and for their continued contributions to our community, and I would ask that the seven representatives, who I believe are in the public gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe, hon. members, that there is a group of grade 6 students from Aldergrove elementary school, located in the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark, who are here today as well. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Canadian International Hospital

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not every day that someone comes up to you and says: hey, I think we have the same DNA. So when a member of the third party said that very thing to me over a pizza not so long ago, I didn't really think very much about it. As events unfolded, however, I began to wonder how someone could possibly know a person's DNA unless they had access to some pretty advanced medical technology.

It turns out that one of the finest places on Earth to get such information is the Canadian international hospital in Hanoi, Vietnam. Now, this is a five-star facility. This 200-bed luxury hospital, fully staffed with Canadian physicians, operates the most modern diagnostic and treatment facilities, including patented DNA sequencing technologies.

1:40

Now, I've never been to Hanoi, but clearly there must be some link here. I was not surprised to learn that the chairman of this facility, this private, for-profit luxury hospital that caters to the seriously rich sick people, happens to be none other than a well-known doctor, former cabinet minister, and recently proclaimed Wildrose policy adviser on health.

The Canadian international hospital, which sounds more like a resort than a hospital, has the finest, most modern facilities. I am particularly impressed by the accommodations for the 30 Canadian physicians who will move to Hanoi. I mean, so long as you have a surplus of doctors in Alberta, how can the loss of 30 really matter? Of course, it does translate into about 200,000 cancelled appointments per year over here. But, really, who's complaining? You can get in to see one of these doctors. All you have to do is fly to Hanoi. Of course, that's only about \$2,700.

Again, that's 30 physicians that a key supporter of the third party has just shipped offshore, at a time when the third-party leader today, Mr. Speaker, talked on the radio about a shortage of doctors in the province of Alberta. Thirty physicians will no longer be in a position to accept patients right here at home, 30 physicians who, if they worked 1,800 hours a year, could see 200 patients a year, and they will in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Thank you.

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

Health Care System Governance

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The floodgates are starting to open, and this government is scrambling for the life rafts. First, the government attempted to cast Dr. McNamee's story of silencing, intimidation, and dismissal as a one-off, a human resource dispute. Yesterday we had no fewer than five physicians emerge with their stories, some with personal details of being victimized by this government's playbook when it comes to suppressing advocacy and dissent in our health care system.

Dr. Fanning says that she was fired after criticizing the government over health care. Dr. Maybaum says that doctors and health care workers must be liberated from the culture of intimidation and that government politicians are insulting health care workers in this province. Dr. Francescutti says that doctors, nurses, and paramedics must be allowed to come forward to tell the truth. Two more doctors, still fearful of this government's retribution, remained anonymous in saying that a culture of silence and personal intimidation has repressed health care workers for years.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, that what we are seeing right now is 15 years of centralization, which has necessitated a culture of intimidation, mismanagement, and political corruption within our public health care system. This same government, who never misses an opportunity to brag about their record for the last 10 or 15 years, now is trying to distance themselves from the reality of the system which they created and nurtured. To say that it was some other government or some other party responsible for these unforgivable acts of bullying and intimidation is wrong.

Forty years ago a tired old government was replaced. Today Albertans have a tired but powerful old government that is no longer able to hide the incompetence, arrogance, and abuses of the power within their system. This government is way past its best-before date. There should be more following the Premier's example and announcing their resignation. The next six months will show what 40 years of unbroken PC rule has inflicted on our democracy. The emperor does not have new clothes. They are exposed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Peace River watershed is the largest in Alberta and covers about one-third of the province. Its water and aquatic systems are critical to the health of Alberta's natural environment. That's why this is an exciting week for my constituents. On Friday the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance will hold its first meeting and elect its inaugural board of directors. The alliance is a partnership between the Alberta government, environmental organizations, aboriginal communities, industry, and others in the Peace River watershed. Its role is to provide an opportunity for people to improve their knowledge and understanding about the watershed and to safeguard the health of the aquatic system in the region.

The Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance will be Alberta's 11th watershed planning and advisory council. These councils are a key component of Alberta's long-term strategy to manage water resources: water for life. This bold plan aims to ensure secure, safe drinking water and healthy aquatic systems for all Albertans. It will accomplish these goals through knowledge, research, partnerships, and water conservation, positioning our province as the leading jurisdiction in North America for water management.

I'm happy to see that northwestern Alberta will soon have its own officially designated council. Watershed planning and advisory councils provide important information to help government make the best water management decisions possible. They also provide valuable information to all Albertans by reporting the state of the watershed.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the members who have joined the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance as they embark on its critical journey of leadership, stewardship, and education. I encourage those in my constituency and all Albertans to get involved in the protection of our precious water resources. After all, the success of these groups often depends on the passionate individuals who volunteer their time and effort to safeguard our environment.

Thank you.

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

Hospital Services Utilization

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before session started, I hosted a town hall meeting on health care. Donna Wilson, a nurse, professor, and researcher, presented an update on health care here in Alberta, an update that shatters the old Tory myth that seniors are responsible for rising health care costs. Ms Wilson's research indicates that in 1993, when we had a \$4 billion health system, we had 110 hospitals, with 13,000 beds. That's one bed for every 200 Albertans. Then came the Conservative cut-backs. Over 12 per cent of nurses were laid off, and 6,500 hospital beds were closed, most of them in Edmonton and Calgary. Then came the constant restructuring of health care governance, which resulted in growing wait-lists and rapid cost inflation, culminating in a single nonelected board. Wait-lists have gotten even worse, cost issues continue, and quality of care is suffering.

Last year our \$15 billion health care system still had 110 hospitals but only 6,800 beds, one bed for every 600 Albertans. Seniors didn't lay off these nurses or close these hospitals. In fact, they're not even using the hospitals as much as people under the age of 65. Seventy-six per cent of all hospital admissions and 84 per cent of all emergency room, day surgery, and outpatient care are for people under the age of 65. These statistics absolutely refute Conservative myths and claims that an aging population is driving up health care costs. In recent days this government has made a big deal about saying that 60 per cent of people have confidence in the health care system. Well, before, it was 90 per cent with confidence in the health care system. In just nine years, Mr. Speaker, health care costs have risen 110 per cent, more than double. This government should stop blaming seniors for those rising costs.

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

Farm Safety Week

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 13 to 19 is Canadian Agriculture Safety Week. Here in Alberta agriculture is our largest renewable resource, and we have more than 50,000 farms. Farm safety is a year-round priority. We believe the key to safe farms is education and awareness. This week the Minister of Agri-

culture and Rural Development announced a new 15-member Farm Safety Advisory Council. The council was formed in response to consultations with more than 20 stakeholder groups, representing more than 50,000 producers.

Its membership includes a variety of representatives with backgrounds in safety, business, and agriculture, all of whom have a deep commitment to farm safety. This council will be co-chaired by industry and government. The advisory council is tasked with developing an action plan on farm safety and will be responsible for helping government enhance farm safety training and education to address the needs identified by industry.

Agriculture and Rural Development's Safety Up! awareness campaign is targeted to new and young farmers and the farm safety club, educating children four to 12 years of age about safe behaviour on farms and working with 4-H to promote agricultural safety. All of these efforts increase local delivery of farm safety knowledge through rural partnership.

The focus of this year's farm safety week is on implementation of safety procedures to manage risk and control hazards. I would like all Albertans to recognize Agriculture Safety Week, and I strongly encourage rural Albertans to look at ways to participate in their community, whether by implementing a farm safety plan or by teaching their children how to play safely on the farm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health Quality Council Review

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Late last week Albertans learned that these Tories forced respected surgeon Dr. Ciaran McNamee out of his job for complaining publicly about surgery wait times and inadequate patient resources. These damning allegations against the Tory government make it clear a Health Quality Council investigation is not enough and that Albertans deserve a fully independent public inquiry completely free from government interference, control, or intimidation. To the Premier: if your government has nothing to hide, will you support the opposition call for a fully independent and open, judge-led public inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what I do support is a complete review by the Health Quality Council, allowing physicians and nurses to come forward and talk about how better to improve the system so that we can learn from the past.

On the other, if there is any wrongdoing on behalf of anyone in the system, it is the duty of those to report directly to Alberta Health Services, or if somebody has their hand in the cookie jar, a criminal matter should go directly to the police.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier do the right thing and release the financial terms of settlement for Dr. McNamee, including the terms of the confidentiality agreement he was forced to sign, so that all Albertans can see how this government muzzles health care professionals for speaking out?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's not a matter for this Assembly to even consider. Let's get this straight. You have a disagreement. You have doctors on one side who are working hard for their particular area of practice. You have other doctors who are working hard for their side of a particular practice. What they've done is come to some kind of an impasse. As a result of

that, a statement of claim got filed, a statement of defence got filed, and guess what? Both sides had their arguments vetted between themselves. They agreed to walk away from it, and that's where it ended.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the denials continue. Will you continue to ignore the facts, Mr. Premier, or will you finally concede that health care staff, including Dr. McNamee, are subject to intimidation and retribution, are disciplined for speaking out on behalf of patients?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think we saw anybody attempting to muzzle the doctors who spoke out on the Thanksgiving Day weekend last year. I can tell you that nobody at the AMA conference last weekend felt intimidated by my presence there or by my staff's presence. What they felt was the building of a good, solid relationship, and we're continuing to foster that while you folks on the other side are trying to undermine it.

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

Patient Advocacy by Physicians

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The list of damning allegations against this government is growing as well-respected doctors, including Dr. Anne Fanning and Dr. Lloyd Maybaum, are speaking out against this government's culture of fear and intimidation. Dr. Maybaum went as far as to say, and I quote: there is just plain fear you'll lose your position. There are a number of different ways that people are fearful and can experience the backlash that occurs when you speak out. End quote. When will the Premier get off his soapbox by saying that health professionals like Maybaum are free to come forward when he says otherwise, with evidence of a culture of fear and intimidation making it impossible?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in the House, physicians, all those that may have had some disagreements in the past within their organization: come forward to the Health Quality Council and bring those allegations forward and have the Health Quality Council look at it. These are physicians that sit on the Health Quality Council. They are professionals, and they are better able to judge what is coming to them in terms of evidence, real, hard evidence of all of these allegations of hush money and allegations.

Dr. Swann: Seriously, Mr. Premier, what do you have to lose by holding a public inquiry, a transparent public inquiry, into allegations of intimidation and financial misconduct? What do you have to lose?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I have to stand up and again remind the member to take a look at the tabling I made a few days back, where the Alberta Health Services leaders, the College of Physicians and Surgeons leaders, and the Alberta Medical Association signed a letter jointly last June. Here's what it said.

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) stands behind any physician who advocates on behalf of his or her patients. Similarly, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) and Alberta Health Services (AHS) also strongly support and encourage patient advocacy.

There it is in print. You should read it.

Dr. Swann: A lot of good that did me in 2002, Mr. Minister.

Instead of finding real solutions to the culture of fear and intimidation, this government is advising health care workers to call the cops. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's hardly a solution. Is that what you're expecting, Mr. Premier? You want us to call the cops when there's a problem?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just hearing the comments from the hon. member, I would suggest that he maybe look to the Alberta Medical Association and to the college, really, to find out why they weren't there to support him during an issue that I suspect he had – what? – over 10 years ago.

The Speaker: Both the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Minister of Health and Wellness: you quoted from documents. I'd ask that you table the appropriate numbers of those documents during the tabling routine.

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

State of the Health Care System

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's do a checkup on health care basics because that is where this government started to lose credibility, and it doesn't look like the diagnosis is improving. To the minister of health: why do 250,000 Albertans still have no access to a family doctor?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are number of initiatives that we're doing to strengthen primary care, and that's one tremendous benefit of a commitment to five years of funding, of a commitment to a five-year health action plan and to the performance measures. We are working very hard to ensure that those people who don't have a doctor or perhaps didn't think they needed a doctor will have access to one. There are two primary parts to this. One is improving access in health care, and the other is reducing wait times. If we added a third, it would be to strengthen primary care, and that's precisely what we're doing.

Ms Blakeman: Get the crash cart.

Back to the same minister: why do more babies die of congenital syphilis in Alberta than in the rest of Canada combined if not for the fact that this government refused, intimidated, and fired the medical officers who were working on that very issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the allegations that have just been made, but I can tell you that there is a syphilis problem in this province, as there is perhaps elsewhere, and we're doing something about it. Very soon, within a few days if not a few weeks, you will see our approach to this matter. You will see the augmentation of dollars into that area because we have to let people know that this is a serious issue, and we're treating it very, very seriously immediately.

Ms Blakeman: No. This government is flatlining on health care.

Back to the same minister: why are waiting lists for non-emergency procedures still months and months and months long?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I said, one of our primary goals is to reduce wait times. Why do you think we gave a guarantee of 6 per cent increases? Why do you think that our province is among the fastest growing rates of doctor personnel? I'll tell you why. Because here we have a plan, and the plan is starting to work, and they don't like it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Patient Advocacy by Physicians

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Every day more and more evidence mounts, unveiling a pervasive culture of fear and intimidation against our doctors and other health care professionals wanting to speak out for their patients' safety: those aren't my words, Mr. Speaker. Those are the words of Dr. Lloyd Maybaum, president of the Calgary physicians' association. The good doctor says that health professionals are fearful of AHS backlash that can occur when speaking out for patients. To the health minister: why won't you call a public inquiry with full powers of subpoena to investigate what has become a total breakdown of confidence in our health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, just a week or two ago his colleagues from Calgary and Fort McMurray were practically begging for the Health Quality Council "to investigate the 322 cases that were documented previously." They said among other things, "We applaud the Health Quality Council's effort to restore public confidence in health care." Others said, "Will the minister of health today commit to all Albertans . . . to launch an investigation?" Well, guess what? That's exactly what we've done. We've brought in an independent review that will be done by a very highly respected body called the Health Quality Council, which two weeks ago they were praising.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, the Health Quality Council is not qualified or sufficiently empowered to investigate allegations of wrongdoing and political interference. You know that, sir. Minister, if evidence continues to be released substantiating a pervasive culture of fear and political interference in our health care system, will you commit to Albertans that you will call a full public inquiry, or will you continue to refuse? It's starting to look like you or your government is hiding something, and I sure hope for your sake that that's not the case.

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, allegations followed by more allegations. The fact is that we have an independent council that is setting its own terms of reference, that is choosing its own people to serve on that committee, that may well bring in people from outside – I don't know – and they'll make all of that public. That is a tremendous accountability. Otherwise, if you follow this member's advice, you'd have cabinet and government determining those things. That's not what I see necessary at this time.

Mr. Anderson: Four new doctors bravely came out of hiding just yesterday, sir – Dr. Maybaum, Dr. Fanning, and others – and there are more coming forward every day. How much more evidence do you want? Given that Dr. Maybaum says, quote, there is a clear and present problem in the health care system, and anybody who suggests that this is preposterous – like this minister always does – quite frankly, is insulting health care workers, unquote, why then does this minister continue to say that the allegations are preposterous? Are you saying that Dr. Maybaum is lying, sir? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've never said words to that effect, and I don't think you'd ever hear me saying that. What I am saying is that there are occasionally disagreements that happen such as was the case with some cases that were brought forward, and perhaps there will be more. As people go and they find differences in their opinions or differences in their perspective because they're lobbying hard for this or they're lobbying hard for that,

obviously some separation of those agreements sometimes occurs, and that's all that's happened here so far that I've seen.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please table the appropriate documents as well at the time coming up.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Health Quality Council Review

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, more doctors are stepping forward by the day with similar allegations – intimidation, questions raised about their mental health, firings – yet this PC government flippantly dismisses these allegations, telling those concerned to go to the police. Will the Premier admit the obvious, that the government has actually no intention of getting to the bottom of this scandalous situation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in the House, the minister has asked the Health Quality Council to draw its own terms of reference and do a full review of all of the allegations that have been made and also how to improve the system given all of the evidence that will be coming forward to the Health Quality Council. I suggest that we give them the opportunity. They're going to move forward almost immediately, and we will have a full review of not only the allegations that have come forward but how to improve the system well into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that in his written instructions to the Health Quality Council regarding this review the minister excludes any mention of investigating charges of intimidation and retribution against doctors or other health care professionals, will the Premier admit that he is merely pretending to get to the bottom of these allegations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council membership is comprised of health professionals, people that know how to deliver health care services. They'll be able to look into all of the allegations and sift out all of the information that is going to come forward. They've always done good reports in the past. They looked at H1N1. They looked at a report coming soon on medevac services in this province. I have tremendous confidence in them to do the right thing for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that more and more doctors are clearly saying now that they will not come forward and co-operate with this government's so-called investigation for fear of retribution, will the Premier please admit that that is exactly what he wants?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, over the last number of years there has been no province in Canada that has seen such a large increase in the number of physicians practising here. They are the best paid, with the lowest taxes and also a five-year funding commitment going to Alberta Health Services. Yesterday – good news – the AMA reached an agreement with government in terms of a three-year funding agreement. That tells me that we have an increase of 22.5 per cent in the number of physicians. They want to come here because it's the best place in Canada to work.

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

Severance Agreements with Physicians

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers deserve for once a straight answer from this government. My first question is to the minister of health. Where in government books can interested taxpayers find the details revealing the financial settlements made to doctors who stood up and spoke out against this government's health care policies?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if there were any kinds of severance agreements and payouts related to that – and I suspect there were – then they will be accounted for in the category for that. I don't have the details for it right in front of me, but I can assure you that it would all have been audited by the Auditor General, and it would all be appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You should have those details, sir.

Again to the same minister: what is the total amount paid out by this government to silence doctors who stood up and spoke out on behalf of their patients about how you were running health care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I suspect the number is zero. What I do think, however, is that there were some honourable negotiations that took place. Some differences of opinion were voiced. In some cases it resulted in separation. In other terms it might have resulted in divorce. But the fact is that the agreements were made. They are sealed in accordance with the nondisclosure agreements that were signed by the parties in question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that over \$42 million – that's \$42 million – was listed last year by Alberta Health Services under other fees, can you please tell taxpayers how many of those other fees were spent in these negotiations to settle with doctors whom you were trying to silence?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there is a process in this government called Public Accounts, and that's the point where members are able to get into the detail of just those such agreements, and if I'm not mistaken, the chairman of Public Accounts is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Maybe he ought to do his job in Public Accounts and ask those questions there.

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

Patient Advocacy by Physicians

(continued)

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Physicians are alleging that they're being silenced, that they're not allowed to speak up for patients. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: do we need a public inquiry to help create an atmosphere where physicians can speak up?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, physicians are speaking up. They do it daily. They've been doing it for quite a while, I suspect. I think what we need is the independent review that has been ordered and that the Health Quality Council of Alberta will carry out. In fact, no one is telling physicians they can't advocate. The exact opposite would be true. The document I referred to earlier,

which I had tabled quite a while ago but will table again at your request, explicitly states, in addition to what I've already said, that "if a physician feels that it is necessary to advance the interests of patients, then he or she should do so."

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Has our relationship with physicians broken down in some fundamental way?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe so. I think the point that the Premier mentioned a little earlier, that we now have an agreement in principle between the government, Alberta Health Services, and the AMA, is a very positive sign that we are moving forward and that there is a relationship that is beginning to work. I just want to say thank you to the Alberta Medical Association and all of its members for recognizing our economic situation, the worst since 1930.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister. The fact remains that some physicians are saying that our relationship with physicians does not work, and they feel that our government has dismissed their concerns. Have we?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. If we had, we wouldn't have an agreement in principle, obviously. I think what has happened here is that doctors more and more are finding Alberta to be a very attractive place to come and practise, and that's why we have had the highest growth rate in attracting doctors of any province over the past 10 years right here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Air Quality Monitoring for Radiation

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, due to the tragic events in Japan it has now been confirmed that radiation is leaking from nuclear plants affected by the tsunami. Meteorologists report that there is danger of nuclear radiation spreading through the atmosphere to Alberta. Accordingly, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What action is being taken by emergency services' air monitoring system or others to prepare for the risk of radiation spreading to Alberta through the jet stream?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to indicate that this is such a tragic situation, and our hearts certainly go out to everyone that was affected by this disaster. Having said that, my department is in regular contact with our counterparts in Ottawa, and at this time they're telling us that the radiation leak in Japan is not expected to pose any health or safety risks in Canada.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Environment: given that meteorologists worry that radiation may in fact reach Alberta, does our air monitoring system have the capacity to measure for radiation in order to protect Albertans?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with our federal counterparts, and this would be a case where it's not only national but international. The kind of monitoring and measurements that the member refers to would not only apply just in Alberta but would be on a national scale, so we would depend upon our na-

tional and international experts to advise us on the ongoing issue if there is one.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, my final question is for the Minister of Energy. Prior to a nuclear plant proposal going forward in this province, will your ministry commit to establishing an expert panel to consult with the public to see whether a nuclear power plant is a viable option for this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, I think the member may not be aware, but the first step that any nuclear plant proposal has to clear is the federal government, so I would suggest that he might want to direct that question to the federal government.

Spring Flooding in Southern Alberta

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, last June my constituents in southeast Alberta faced significant and devastating flooding, which resulted in the largest disaster recovery package in our province's history. With warmer temperatures now occurring, my constituents are again facing real flooding concerns. A high water table and larger than normal snowpack only exacerbate the situation. In fact, many have been in close contact with me, and they are worried. My constituents need to know their government is on their side. To the Minister of Environment: what are you doing to ensure your department is providing all assistance necessary to mitigate potential flooding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me point out that not only are this member's constituents concerned but mine, as we are in adjoining constituencies. I can assure all of the residents of southeastern Alberta that we are doing everything that we can to prepare for any kind of negative impact. We've just today activated the Flood Response Coordination Centre to coordinate the flow of information between the city and the county and the residents. This morning we issued a snowmelt advisory, and we will continue to work very closely with city and county officials to ensure that appropriate actions are taken.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that this may just be the start and that two homes I know of currently have water running through them because of this early melt, I'm sure there will be more. What plans do you have in place to assure and assist this area of the province with the flooding they are currently experiencing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The southeastern area of the province is certainly experiencing localized flooding. We've been planning for flooding and working with the county of Cypress and the city of Medicine Hat to get prepared. As of this morning we've got an emergency management officer on site, and we've arranged for the loan of a sandbagging machine from the city of Calgary and authorized the purchase of a Candam, which is a 300-metre dam made in Medicine Hat, that will help prevent the spread of water.

Mr. Mitzel: My second supplemental is to the same minister. As this is now a new flood and all claims are not yet cleared from last year and residents are still dealing with the effects of the flood

from last year, what's being done or what will be done to help them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our efforts to assist the affected Albertans are ongoing, and our goal is to ensure that they receive the maximum amount of dollars that they are eligible for under the disaster recovery program. We've successfully provided first cheques or closed 98 per cent of the residential applications in this area. While we're running nine disaster recovery programs throughout the province, we continue to pay special attention to southern Alberta. We're all working together to prepare as well, and we're watching closely to see what Mother Nature might bring us.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Farm Worker Safety

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll stay on the health-related theme for today. Agricultural work makes the top-five list for high-risk occupations in Canada. This government is aware of that, yet the rights of farm employees in Alberta continue to be ignored. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: where is the logic behind the decision made by this government to have mandatory investigations for some workplace injuries in the case of the 12 industrial oil workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, let me try to explain the logic, and if what I say doesn't make sense, I would encourage the hon. member to meet with some actual farmers, and maybe they can reinforce what I say. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of farming in Alberta is done on family farms, where people not only work and farm their own land but actually live and play and entertain on that land. Obviously, the presence of occupational health and safety in a setting where you have people living and working at the same time is not very conducive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a total red herring, and this minister knows it. He knows we aren't talking about family. We are talking about employees, corporate farms.

As the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour stated, the Farm Safety Advisory Council is a blatant example of public relations. Why another stall tactic instead of action to provide paid farm workers with the same rights as other workers in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, all farms are incorporated; hence, they are corporate farms.

I have to tell you that our minister of agriculture has just put in place a plan on how to deal with the health and safety of farmers and individuals who work on farms and who live on farms by way of educating, sharing best practices, and actually having farmers help farmers, having individuals who know something about farming, unlike, perhaps, the hon. member and myself, institute safety on the farm.

Ms Pastoor: When members of the board instead of its chair are already speaking about their views on farm safety in the province, it's clear to me that shared views with the government have already again led to membership on a board. Is the minister just looking for confirmation of a decision that he's already made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These wonderful Albertans that offered their time to serve on this board came from all over the province and put forward their names. I had it reinforced for me again this morning in a meeting that I had in Trochu, Alberta, with a group of 25 agricultural producers when I asked them right flat out how we could help them and they said: no more regulations. I said: are we moving in the right direction with our farm safety instead of workmen's compensation and occupational health and safety? They said: absolutely; this is what we want.

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

Allegations of Criminal Wrongdoing

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few weeks opposition members have implied or accused the government, the current and former ministers of health, the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the Alberta Medical Association of everything from breaking the law through blackmail and payoffs to fraudulent bookkeeping. All my questions are for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister explain once again how any allegations of criminal misconduct should be dealt with and who they should be reported to?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do feel as though there's a need for some precision in language here. The debate in recent weeks has passed back and forth between allegations relating to management issues and so on, which I would submit are certainly a good subject for the Health Quality Council to deal with, but from time to time they've crossed over into allegations of criminal wrongdoing, and there is only one answer for that situation, and that is the police and police investigation.

Mr. Johnston: To the same minister: further to your first response can you then explain to the House what a public inquiry can and cannot do?

Mr. Olson: Well, a public inquiry is not meant to be a substitute for a criminal investigation. So referring to my first question, if we are talking about allegations of criminal wrongdoing, there is only one process. That's the courts. That is an independent judge, and it has sanctions at the end. If we're talking about something else such as management issues, then there is an appropriate venue already in place. If there were a public inquiry, what would a judge do? He would need experts to help him such as the Health Quality Council.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition members have been using a statement of claim as supposed evidence to prove wrongdoing by this government. Can the minister explain to the House what is contained in a statement of claim and what its purpose is?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, a statement of claim contains allegations in a civil matter. It's usually met by a statement of defence, which contains either further allegations or denials. We can't base decisions on allegations and denials in a statement of claim and a statement of defence. We need evidence.

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

Nuclear Power

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Energy brushed off the dangers related to nuclear power, but with the tragic events in Japan, we are seeing prudent governments – Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, for example – taking strong actions to respond with measures to increase safety. Indeed, the EU just today completed an emergency debate on the issue and agreed on a number of preventative actions as a first step. Will the Minister of Energy join this discussion and reassure Albertans that nuclear energy is one hazard that this province will steer clear of now and in the future?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I assume they had an emergency debate because they have nuclear power. Alberta doesn't have nuclear power. I'm not quite sure what the member is trying to get at.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Infrastructure recently joined the Member for Athabasca-Redwater at a meeting to defend its deeply unpopular land-use bills and that those attending were told that the need for a massive proposed power line is to facilitate a nuclear power facility in northwest Alberta, will the Minister of Energy admit that the government is actively enticing Bruce Power to bring the nuclear industry to Alberta and commit to reversing this position immediately?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, you know, I have no idea what the member is talking about because I wasn't at any particular meeting. But I did hear the member who I think was referred to, who happens to sit next to me, express some outrage when that particular accusation was made. Considering the track record of that member and the accuracy of some of her preambles, I'm just going to pass on it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans have already expressed strong opposition to nuclear power and have so far been ignored by the Tories and given that the events in Japan demonstrate that the most fail-safe nuclear plants are never actually completely fail safe, will the minister assure Albertans that nuclear power is excluded from all consideration as an option to provide power for the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again the member's recollection of what Albertans expressed through the public consultation process that we undertook is wrong. What Albertans expressed to us is that we have an open, competitive generation market and that at such time that an application is filed, it should be considered along with any other particular proposals, provided, of course, that it gets approval at the federal level, which is the first step that any project would need.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government claims that education was protected in the budget this year, but parents, teachers, and school boards have been crunching the numbers, and they are saying that that's simply not true. To the Minister of Education: are struggling school boards, larger classes, and staff

layoffs what the minister had in mind when he talked about Inspiring Education for the past three years?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. When I was talking about Inspiring Education, I was talking about the kind of education we need to have for the students of our province now and in the future so that they can be citizens of the world and compete in a global economy as well as in the local economy. We're talking about students with 21st century skills – literacy skills, foundational skills, and numeracy – those types of things which make it possible for every child to succeed. In Inspiring Education we are talking about every child having value and every child being able to succeed to their potential.

Mr. Chase: It would seem, Mr. Speaker, that every child, if they're to have value, should be invested in, but that's not what's happening with your cuts. At a time when other countries are looking to copy the Alberta initiative for school improvement in their own schools, why is this government cutting AISI by 50 per cent? How is that progressive?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the fact that this year we have a restrained budget and we need to show restraint at a time when revenues are not as high as they have been in the past means that we have to make some very tough decisions, and education is not immune from those tough decisions. I would grant, hon. member, that cutting the AISI budget was one of the most difficult decisions that I've had to make as minister because AISI is a very, very important program.

Mr. Chase: Obviously, AISI is dependent on oil and gas revenue rather than sustainable funding.

If this government needs to save \$40 million, why not trim the \$170 million taxpayer dollars going to subsidize private school tuition every year instead of cutting projects that help public schools improve student learning?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my first answer, every student in Alberta has value. Every child in Alberta has value, and every child in Alberta, I'd go on to say, needs to have a place in the education system. Some people choose to be in the private school system, and those students are supported by public dollars to the tune of 70 per cent of the operational dollars that public school students get. So if we were to cut the funding to the private schools, I would suggest that we would find more of those students in the public schools, and we would end up having to take the dollars for the public school system and spread them even more thinly.

The Speaker: I would like to remind all members again that this is question period. Budgetary questions and particularly Education's budget will come before the House on the afternoon of April 19. There will be three hours that could be devoted to this subject.

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Employment and Immigration Funding

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta and the world emerge from one of the worst recessions in decades, the number one concern is ensuring that Albertans are back at work. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Has Alberta regained all of the jobs it lost during the recession?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, no, not entirely. As a matter of fact, there has been good news coming to Alberta from Statistics Canada, showing that we are regaining jobs at a leading pace. However, during the recession Alberta had some 2.08 million people working, and now there are approximately 2.06 million, so we still have some way to go. However, we're on the right track, and we're leading the country right now in job recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. On Friday Stats Canada released encouraging numbers, showing Alberta tied for the second-lowest unemployment rate, but I still have constituents looking for a job or for a better job. What's your department doing to help them fully participate in the labour force?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of initiatives are in place. Our 59 LMIC offices throughout the province deliver a variety of programs. One of them will be the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy, which allows for programming for upgrading skills, providing some foundational learning for Albertans and also providing benefits and a subsistence allowance for those who choose to upgrade their skills and re-enter the workforce at a higher level of pay and a higher level skill set.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Youth unemployment is high in parts of the province, yet the minister has cut the Youth Connections program from his budget. Why did you cut this program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the answer is obvious. Some budgetary decisions had to be made. This ministry has a budget diminished by some \$70 million. The budget may be diminished, and the offices may not be available any longer, but I have to assure you that the services will continue to be delivered to our youth through our 59 offices throughout the province and through the use of social media and other delivery methods that actually, perhaps, could be much better received by our young people.

The Speaker: I'm going to repeat what I just said to the previous member with respect to budgets. This budget for this department was dealt with in this Assembly last evening for three hours. This is the question period.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Health Quality Council Review

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when questioned by the Wildrose, the health minister denied that he'd ever categorically said no to a Health Quality Council review, instead insisting he said: no, not at this time. Days later the Health Quality Council review was announced. Later in the day, when I asked him if he would call an independent judicial inquiry, he said: no, not at this time. To the health minister: given that you've set the precedent for changing your mind, and you're going from no to "not at this time," when can we expect you to say yes and call a public inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's like saying: I love you, but I'm not ready to marry you at this time. What part of that don't you understand? No, not at this time.

I said that I would review and take appropriate actions at the right time. That's all there is to it. After I had more information and we looked at it and had a chat about it, we decided to call an independent review as requested

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yikes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are you going to accept? He's already married.

Mrs. Forsyth: No. Not at this time. [laughter] Holy mackerel, Mr. Speaker. You've got to be kidding me. Whoa.

Given that the health minister has said no and not at this time – and I'm not talking about marriage, thank you very much – and the Premier continues to say a flat out no, will you on behalf of Albertans and the medical profession fulfill your role as a health minister and push for a public inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll go through this again. On March 7 this same member said, "Given that the Health Quality Council can't investigate until directed to do so, why hasn't the health minister given such orders?" Guess what? I did. Later that day this same member who's asking the question said, "Mr. Minister: will you call in the Health Quality Council to investigate the 322 cases that were documented previously?" Yes, I will. And, yes, I already did.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm pretty good at convincing people, and that same minister said no. Then he said: not at this time. Then he said yes. So thank you.

My final question is to the minister. If you truly care about the health care system, if you want to live up to your commitment of an open and transparent government, and if you really believe health care professionals and doctors shouldn't be silenced and they shouldn't be muscled, will you reassure Albertans and call for a full public inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a public inquiry, which clearly they don't understand, would require cabinet to direct and dictate the terms of reference. Who would conduct it? Who would sit on it? That's not independence the way people want an independent review to be done. I find it quite interesting that on one day they are praising the Health Quality Council, and now they are casting innuendo against the people that they stood behind just last week. I don't understand that. It sounds very confusing on their part.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government announced changes to the way noncompulsory tradespeople employed as temporary foreign workers can apply for permanent residency. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why was there a need to make this change now?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a case of walking your talk. I strongly believe that not only Alberta's but Canada's immigration policies have to reflect what is good for Canada and what

is good for Alberta. We have a cap of 5,000 appointees under the provincial nominee program, and it is imperative that we nominate the skill sets that are needed by our economy right now and allow them to stay.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: on the whole is Alberta getting immigrants with the skills needed in our province to ensure that our economy has a sufficient supply of labour?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, for those immigrants that are appointed through the provincial nominee program, the answer will be yes, 100 per cent yes. Those immigrants are matching exactly the needs of our economy. Other streams through which immigrants come in: some happen to have the skill sets that are compatible to our economy but not all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The fact is, Minister, that after employing every Albertan and Canadian, we still need immigration. What concrete steps are you taking in your meetings with your federal counterparts to increase the flow of skilled immigrants to Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I continue to impress the urgency upon our federal colleagues. The fact is that we're facing a perfect storm. Baby boomers are retiring as of this year, natural population growth is slightly above zero, our economy is growing at a great pace, and our appetite for services is insatiable. What does it mean? It means we will have severe shortages of workers for many years to come.

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

Security of Health Data

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What personal information could be more private to individuals than information about their surgery and wounds labelled with their names? This is the sensitive information that has been reported missing from the Misericordia hospital. The Health Information Act is supposed to protect the privacy of this kind of health information but has repeatedly failed. My questions are to the minister of health. Why doesn't the minister conduct random audits to ensure compliance with security standards, especially for encryption of mobile IT devices?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what happened with respect to the file that went missing may well have been a simple case of human error. I know that Covenant Health has accepted full responsibility for that, and they are going to do everything possible to ensure that it doesn't happen again. Unfortunately, human error does occur to even the best of us, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: You have to have health privacy that includes the human error. Why are you unable to do that? You have to be able to work human error into your privacy legislation. Why haven't you done it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as new technologies, new procedures are developed, we look at them. We consider them. We try

to keep up as best we can with these changing technologies to provide the very assurances this member is looking for. I can assure her and I can assure all Albertans that we take cases like this very seriously, as does Covenant Health.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to the same minister, then. As more and more databases are being strung together and personal health information in electronic form can be sent across the world with the hit of the send button, what protocols has this government identified for connected networks where information gets secondary and tertiary use like the new TALON system?

Mr. Zwoddesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty good thought there, and I'm going to have to take a look into the exact details of what Alberta Health Services has in terms of its own operations and what Covenant Health has in terms of their operations. I'm sure that they have taken this already under advisement and into account, and I would be equally sure that they also have some protocols to offer the maximum protection possible. But in the end you still have human people doing human entries, and human error may still occur, unfortunately.

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

Degree Granting Approval Process

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's fair to say that Alberta is known for the quality of our postsecondary programming. We need to ensure that these high standards are upheld and new programs of study are introduced that meet society's needs as well as the needs of students. The Campus Alberta Quality Council makes recommendations on what new degree programs are offered in the province. However, I'm told the process can be very slow, and I'm told that the process is more subjective rather than objective. My questions are to the minister of advanced education. Minister . . .

The Speaker: We'll hear from him now.

Mr. Bhullar: . . . tell me why it takes so long.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond to that. In my travels around the province and in talking to institutions I, too, have heard concerns about the time that it can take to get a new degree or new diploma approved. It can be quite onerous. So I talked to the department, and there is a process that has to be followed. First, the program has to be reviewed by the department to ensure that it meets the institution's guidelines, that the program is needed, that the funding is available to deliver the program. Then there are experts recruited from around the world, actually . . .

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell me what specific process improvements he's considering to ensure that institutions don't have to wait many, many months or even years to get an answer?

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are constantly looking at program reviews to shorten the timelines on these new degree programs. One of the key things is making sure that the application is complete when it comes in. Often we have to go back and work with the institutions to continue to garner informa-

tion until we get a complete application that can be reviewed. This can take some time as we develop the process, but we're trying to streamline that each time we do one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question will be to the same minister. Minister, what if a postsecondary institution does not agree with the council's decision? What appeal mechanisms do they have, if any? What mechanisms do they have to make sure that the actual answer was based on the best interests of Alberta students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the department we also do review these, but each institution has the opportunity to reapply for any program that may have been brought forward with some changes made to it. So there's never a no. We try to work with institutions to ensure that each program has the best opportunity to be approved. So we'll continue to work with institutions, and we'll try to make sure that all of these get a fair shake and get a chance to be approved.

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

Residential Building Code

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than 300 tenants of the Penhorwood apartments in Fort McMurray were evacuated after a report commissioned by the condo association identified major structural problems. Unfortunately, this is a situation that is being played out in communities across Alberta with increasing regularity. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will he admit that his lack of oversight and inaction on the regulation of construction file has led to the erosion of construction standards?

2:40

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the opposite is, actually, what's happening. It's because of the due diligence of the inspectors and looking at the building codes that we're able to identify such buildings and actually work with individual residences to make sure that the buildings are safe for occupancy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They had to hire separate investigators to find things out.

To the minister again: why has the minister been so reluctant to exercise the authority granted to him under the Safety Codes Act to intervene in cases where homeowners impacted by poor building practices are unable to get satisfaction from their local municipalities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the changes to the building codes occur because of the comments that we constantly receive from Albertans, and those concerns and issues are brought forward. That's how the codes are improved and enhanced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: given the minister's very public comments about introducing legislation this spring to protect homeowners from poor building practices, why has he failed to do so?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I continue to work with my counterparts and with industry, and it's still our intent to look at changes in legislation in the very near future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes Oral Question Period. There were 19 sets. Nineteen members were identified today and 114 questions and responses.

Just a bit of a follow-up from the question period, there are some tablings that will have to be dealt with. I asked the Leader of the Official Opposition to table some documents that he quoted from. Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, I believe you indicated in a subsequent question that you had already tabled that document, so that won't be required to be redone. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, you were requested to table some documents as well.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and the Routine is dealing with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Health Care System Administration

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are excited about two things today, the return of spring finally and the feeling that after years and years we're finally getting close to getting some answers about what's wrong with the management of our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the people of Alberta continue to have great faith in the ability of our system to deliver great health care provided they can find the secret password that allows them to access the system in time. In other words, the people continue to believe that if they're facing a serious illness or a medical emergency and they can get in, our acute-care system will likely save their lives. But it's also no secret that the people of Alberta have next to no confidence in the administration of Alberta's health care system, and that is true no matter how far the current minister puffs out his chest and spouts righteous indignation at his critics. They've been watching it get worse for 15 years now, through three massive reorganizations, about a dozen different deputy ministers of health, and enough 180-degree changes of direction that it's a wonder our kids haven't all been born dizzy.

Here's the thing. The people who deliver great health care are, among others on the front line, our doctors; and the administrators, the people who run the part of the system Albertans have no faith in, are from this government on down the people who would be in a position to silence and intimidate the front-line docs and others who are responsible for speaking truth to power when they see a problem.

We now have the case of Dr. McNamee and that of another Edmonton doctor who has told CBC she was forced from her job and her mental stability questioned. She remains anonymous because of a nondisclosure agreement. Dr. Fanning has now gone public. Dr. Maybaum says health care professionals have to be liberated from the climate of intimidation that pervades the system. I'd bet you, Mr. Speaker, that every single opposition member has had doctors tell them horror stories ending with the words, "But I can't go public; it'll cost me my job." I know I have.

A full public judicial inquiry would clear the air, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's the only thing that can.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented in the House on Thursday, March 10, 2011, and I can advise the House that all but one of the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

The committee has considered the petitions and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 94(1)(b) be waived for the petition of the Galt Scholarship Fund Transfer Act subject to the petitioner completing the necessary advertising in accordance with the standing orders before the committee hears the petitioner.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, do you concur in the report just provided? All in favour, say yes.

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Speaker: Opposed, say no. It's carried.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 205

Municipal Government (Delayed Construction) Amendment Act, 2011

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce my private member's bill, Bill 205, the Municipal Government (Delayed Construction) Amendment Act, 2011.

This bill will allow municipalities to better regulate construction within their own boundaries and to ensure that projects are not significantly stalled, suspended, or delayed for unreasonable lengths of time. The legislation would give municipalities clear authority to intervene when construction sites become significantly stalled, suspended, or delayed. In these cases I propose that municipalities should hold the authority to require the owner of a delayed project to improve the appearance of the site within a specified time frame.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite amount of copies of two documents to which I referred yesterday during the Standing Order 30 emergency debate.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the website pro forma for the Canadian international hospital.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of tabling copies of a letter to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development from Bill Leithead, an Alberman, pertaining to his concerns and not getting responses to the issues surrounding Bill 36 and Bill 50.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition an article from the *Calgary Herald*, dated Tuesday, March 15, 2011 – this, of course, comes from question period – where Dr. Lloyd Maybaum, president of the Calgary & Area Physicians Association states: many, many cases of physicians being intimidated and threatened.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that was the tabling document that I requested?

Mr. MacDonald: That's correct.

The Speaker: Okay. It's completed, then.
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: C. Morag Dornian, Randy Zielke, Patricia Sullivan, Fred Vermeulen, N. Sjomann, Gwen Wozny, Denise Wall, Eileen Kosior, Robin Hitchon, Dwayne Hebron, Bernie Schaloske, Lorraine Nordstrom, Andrew Burla, Maddy Gustavson, Marion McFall, Ann Card, Dr. Maureen McCall, Janice Pitman, Bonnie Denhaan, Dawn Macdonald, Noreen Sundstrom, Dave Collyer, Matthew Johnson, Patricia Gaviller, and Alan Kane.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, you sent a note with respect to the tabling that you must provide to the House. You said in a note to me on the back of an envelope: the quote was taken off a CTV broadcast report, not print; how do I table that? Well, very simply. What you do is get a copy of the television broadcast. You get it translated into English, you have a notary public declare it to be true and correct, and you come back tomorrow and table it in the House with the appropriate copies. Not a problem.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Olson, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, a letter dated March 7, 2011, from the hon. Mr. Olson, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, to Mr. Drysdale, chair, Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services, regarding a letter dated February 15, 2011, from the hon. Ms Redford, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General, to Mr. Drysdale correcting costs related to administering and supervising a leadership disclosure system.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 15, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, victims of crime in Alberta must be treated with dignity and respect, and I believe that these amendments will help us to provide them with the services they deserve. The impact of violent and serious crime can be profound for victims, and we want our legislation to provide as much support as possible.

The number of victims applying for financial benefits has increased significantly; therefore, our current processes are also being reviewed to ensure they continue to effectively handle this increasing volume. As part of the review we held consultations with stakeholders in January, Mr. Speaker, and we asked for public input via a website, an online survey. The input received during consultations is reflected in the proposed amendments.

Mr. Speaker, two core programs serve victims of crime in our province: the financial benefits program and the victims of crime grants program, which allocates funding to organizations that provide information, support, and referrals to victims of crime. Albertans who are victims of violent crime can apply for a one-time financial benefit for their injuries through the financial benefits program. This program is unique in North America because benefits are based on the severity of injury. It is not a compensation program. For example, it does not require victims injured in a violent crime to provide records of expenses or to show a loss of income. It's an acknowledgement that the victim has suffered due to injuries associated with a criminal act. The benefits program does not compensate for property damage, motor vehicle collisions, or lost wages.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we are providing \$14 million for the financial benefits program. Organizations in Alberta that provide services to victims of crime receive funding from the government of Alberta through the victims of crime fund. In the province there are currently 121 police-based and 29 community-based organizations that provide such vital services. Last year \$9.7 million was allocated between these 150 programs, which, in turn, provided support for more than 60,000 victims of crime and trauma in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go briefly into some detail about the proposed amendments. They relate to four main areas, the first of which involves administrative processes relating to the Criminal Injuries Review Board, or the CIRB. Amendments relating to the CIRB will safeguard the rights of applicants to receive fair reviews and will help increase the efficiency of the CIRB processes. We propose that the board only review the evidence before them rather than accepting new evidence. In addition, we propose that the board must send an application back to the director when new evidence or information is uncovered. This clarifies that the board does not reinvestigate, and it will ensure consistency and efficiency, resulting in timely decisions for victims.

Our amendments also state that the board chair can appoint up to three members to sit on a review panel. This will also improve the flexibility of the review process. We also wish to amend the processes for providing notification to the parties involved and for making submissions to the board. In addition, we propose that the board must refer matters back to the director when a decision on eligibility or dismissal of an application is overturned by the review panel. Mr. Speaker, these proposals will result in a more efficient and equitable review process, ultimately resulting in better service for victims of violent crime in Alberta.

This bill will also bring the director's authority in line with the applicant's ability to challenge a board decision, Mr. Speaker. Currently the applicant can appeal to the Court of Appeal while the director seeks judicial review at the Court of Queen's Bench. The amendment will give the director and the applicant the same rights of appeal, leading to consistent interpretation of the act. We

also wish to replace the word “hearing” with the word “review,” which will help clarify the intent of the process.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in this area we propose a transitional period to allow reviews already in progress to be concluded in accordance with the relevant legislation. This will ensure that people already involved in the appeals process are treated fairly.

These changes will reduce the amount of time required to bring an appeal forward to the CIRB, Mr. Speaker, which means quicker decisions for victims. Also, each time new evidence is introduced by a victim on appeal, the case will be sent back to the program. This will again result in quicker decisions.

We also wish to set the death benefit in the regulation, a solution which will be fair and compassionate to victims and surviving family members.

With respect to the length of time to apply, Mr. Speaker, currently the department receives applications for injuries that are decades old. There may be no police or medical records available, and without such independent verification the likelihood of fraudulent applications increases. So we propose to introduce a 10-year limit on applications. This is in line with the Limitations Act, which sets a limit of 10 years on civil matters. For child victims the 10-year period would start when they reach the age of majority to ensure that they have access to the financial benefits program.

At the moment applicants must apply for benefits within two years from the date that they become aware of or know or ought to have known the nature of their injuries. However, the current legislation allows for open-ended discretion on this time limit. We propose to change the above reference to: should have known that a crime has occurred or 10 years from the date that the crime occurred, whichever expires first.

We also wish to address grant funding for victims of crime programs and organizations. The bill will make sure that victims of crime legislation is current with other acts, such as the Youth Criminal Justice Act, that reference the victims of crime fund. In the current act the minister can only introduce or improve programs or initiatives to benefit victims of crime by amending the act. This has limited the government’s ability to be innovative and to fund new programs. In this bill we are proposing to allow the minister to make recommendations for grants both with and without the recommendations of the victims of crime committee, making the process more responsive to the immediate needs of organizations serving victims. Mr. Speaker, the change will not impact the grant application process funding for police-based or community-based programs.

Other proposals state that definitions may be added, amended, or deleted to help modernize the act. For example, Mr. Speaker, the term “law enforcement agency” is being replaced with “police service” to provide clarity. We also propose giving the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to make additional regulations as required. This again will make programs more responsive and current.

Mr. Speaker, this government and my ministry are committed to ensuring that victims of crime continue to be treated with dignity and respect. The amendments being proposed today are needed to ensure that the services, programs, and financial benefits currently available to victims of crime continue to be provided efficiently and fairly. As a result of these amendments victims will be able to receive a financial benefit sooner, new government programs can be introduced in a more timely fashion, and the appeals process will be faster. The amendments will also provide support for those organizations that assist Alberta’s victims and will recognize the hardships that victims experience through no fault of their own.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide these comments. At this time I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 12, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011.

The Alberta Investment Management Corporation, better known as AIMCo, is the government’s investment manager. AIMCo is responsible for managing nearly \$70 billion in investments for the government, including the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the sustainability fund, and public-sector pension funds.

3:00

AIMCo was formed in 2008 with a mission to seek the greatest financial returns with an acceptable level of risk for the clients on whose behalf they invest. Now that AIMCo has been in operation for a few years, amendments are needed to its governing legislation to allow AIMCo to continue to invest Albertans’ money as effectively and efficiently as possible. An amendment within Bill 12 would provide AIMCo with additional indemnification powers for its employees and directors.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Under the current legislation AIMCo can already grant indemnity, or legal protection, to a person who acts or acted as a director or officer of a directly owned corporation. The amendment essentially broadens the scope of people who can be indemnified as part of their investment process. It will now include those whom AIMCo appoints indirectly as directors on boards of corporations or similar entities they make significant investments in. It would also ensure that AIMCo employees who act as directors of indirectly held corporations are covered.

A second set of amendments within Bill 12 would see changes to the section which outlines directors’ responsibilities. We are adding a provision to the act that clarifies that AIMCo must consider the best interests of the designated entities, which are their clients, in providing investment management services. The act already contains a requirement for directors and officers to act in the best interests of the corporation. This amendment makes it clear that what is in the best interests of the corporation is to act in the best interests of its clients. This change replaces the current wording in the act, that requires AIMCo directors and officers to have due regard to the interests of the Crown and designated entities.

As well, a conflict of interest subsection is being added to protect the corporation and its directors further. This addition will effectively provide the same conflict of interest provisions that apply to directors of any company under the Business Corporations Act.

The remaining amendments within Bill 12 deal with some minor technical changes. For instance, language is being added to explicitly state that compliance with any directive issued by the government is deemed to be in the best interests of the corporation. This would relieve directors from liability provided that they comply with the directive in a prompt and efficient manner.

We’re also clarifying the legal ownership structure of AIMCo. Since the act states that AIMCo is a corporation with one share owned by the Crown, it is confusing to also say it consists of a board of directors. We’re clearing up the confusion by removing those words with no legal consequence.

As you’ve heard, the amendments within Bill 12 are needed to ensure that AIMCo has the proper governance in place and can

continue to operate effectively while investing the province's substantial assets on behalf of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14

Wills and Succession Amendment Act, 2011

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 14, the Wills and Succession Amendment Act, 2011.

The Wills and Succession Act governs how and to whom property is transferred when a person dies. Bill 14 contains a small but important amendment to the Wills and Succession Act, which was passed in this Legislature in the fall of 2010 and will likely come into force in January 2012.

The new act will allow courts to correct certain deficiencies in invalid wills to make them valid. This correction power applies to wills or, more accurately, invalid wills made after the act comes into force. For example, under the Wills and Succession Act a court can add words to a will if there is proof they were omitted by mistake.

As this act reads now, it appears that the correction powers can be used to re-evaluate wills of people who are already deceased. This creates the immediate potential for disputes, delay, and expense. In fact, there are already a few cases in which parties are holding up estates and probate applications so that they can try to get wills that are invalid under current law validated under new law. There may also be attempts to open closed estates.

The intent of the Wills and Succession Act was that the new act operate on a go-forward basis. This amendment in Bill 14 will make it clear that the new will correction powers will not apply to the estates of people who are already deceased. Justice officials, the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and similar reforms proposed in British Columbia all support the proposed approach.

As this is already affecting the administration of some estates, it is important that we act quickly to incorporate this change. I urge all hon. members to support this important change.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate at this time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011, will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period of April 1, 2011, to April 28, 2011, inclusive. It is anticipated that funding authority for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, will be provided on that date. The required funding authority for the full year is detailed in the 2011-12 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on February 24, 2011. These interim supply amounts reflect both the anticipated date of full supply and the fact that many payments are monthly. Other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The act would provide spending authority for the following amounts: \$4.94 billion in expense, \$252 million in capital investment, and \$43 million in nonbudgetary disbursements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and have a few things get on the record regarding Bill 13. It's not unusual for this government to request interim supply. It's not unreasonable. When you go through the list – well, everyone is included in this list, as far as I can see, including the offices of the Legislative Assembly. Certainly, the one that catches my eye is the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, which is to receive 2 and a half million dollars from this bill. Hopefully, that is money or funds that will be used to plan the enumeration that is to occur, as I understand it, in September. I believe it's the last week in August and the first two weeks of September. Hopefully, we will have a thorough enumeration that will provide to all political parties accurate information on the 87 constituencies we now have. That would certainly be one expenditure of note.

3:10

With the office of the Chief Electoral Officer I find it odd that many of the returning officers for the next election have been appointed through Elections Alberta, but I have yet – now, I could stand to be corrected – to see a list of those individuals who have been selected by Elections Alberta to manage or conduct the next provincial election. But looking at that item, certainly this amount of money and what was provided last year should fund the administration of a provincial election, not only fund it but make sure that it is fair and even for each and every political party.

Now, the Health and Wellness budget – of course, we're looking at getting started there – at the end of the year will be probably above \$15 billion. It is a lot of money, and I for one don't have confidence in this government's ability to manage the health care budget. That's right. I do not have confidence in this government's ability to manage the health care budget, manage the \$40 billion in expenditures as well.

I don't have confidence, hon. minister, and this is why. For the last week or so we have been asking questions, Mr. Speaker, regarding Health and Wellness. We know Health and Wellness would always put out, essentially, two annual reports, section I and section II. Section I dealt with the ministry, the budget of Health and Wellness, and section II would deal with in this case the nine RHAs, the Alberta Cancer Board, the Alberta Mental Health Board, and the Health Quality Council of Alberta. The Health Quality Council of Alberta would be the last entity noted in the financial reports.

When you look at the financial reports and you compare them from one year to the next, you certainly see a lot of differences. Now, Mr. Speaker, this is why I think we have to be very, very reluctant whenever we're authorizing this government to spend money on behalf of citizens because there are some changes made in these financial statements that relate to the questions we have asked. The first change: this is in the unaudited portion, and I'm going to use 2008-09 as an example. Why would you, for instance, make a statement under the financial highlights? Again, I would like to stress that these financial highlights are not audited. They're unaudited. So if you want to hopefully get correct information, you would go to the audited statements.

Now, I asked questions about this last week. I didn't get any answers. The government is asking for a lot of money, over \$2.2

billion, for health care. My questions were around the one-time funding. If we look at the annual report, Mr. Speaker, we can see where the government indicates:

Excluding one-time funding, Alberta Health Services received a \$522 million, or an eight per cent, increase in base operational support. If one-time funding is included, it equals an \$830 million funding increase, or 12.5 per cent, primarily attributed to population increases and inflation. One-time funding for 2008/2009 includes a \$97 million payment to the former Chinook, Calgary and Peace Country health regions for 2007/2008 net accumulated deficit elimination.

In other words, that's money that was provided to those three health authorities; \$97 million was provided to those three health authorities for a previous year's deficit.

Another one-time \$80 million payment was required to support the transition of provincial health service delivery to a single health authority.

There are a lot of different things going on in that one health authority, Mr. Speaker, now. That \$80 million was transferred out to the old East Central region, and it was used for everything from transition costs – that's correct – to severance payments, to top up those pension funds, including, of course, the one big pension, the \$22,400 a month pension for life, that I believe is indexed, to Mr. Jack Davis, the former administrator at the Calgary health authority. That's where that \$80 million was slotted for.

Now, you have \$80 million, and you have \$97 million. That totals \$177 million. Perhaps in the course of debate the minister of finance can finally shed some light and clarify this. When you look and you do the math, you have a lot of money left. You have \$131 million. We know that, for instance, in supplementary supply that \$97 million allocation was made, that \$80 million allocation was made, but the additional money – and if we go to another portion of the annual report, we can see where it is outlined. There are \$200 million of overexpended amounts in the books. So, of course, you get this \$377 million total.

To clear up the confusion around this, the government could provide an explanation as to where that money came from, the \$200 million. If it was spent on one-time funding, where? I can't find any details on this. The only thing the government can do to try to defend themselves is to say: "Well, it's audited. It's audited, and if you don't like that, go to the cops."

I was listening in question period, you know, Mr. Speaker, and I was thinking: "K Division is not that far north on 109th Street. Maybe that's the place to go for an answer." But I think in the course of debate with this requisition, those details on how this government is going to budget and manage their money this year are related to what has happened in the past. And if hon. members of this Assembly are a little bit reluctant to support Bill 13, well, there are a number of reasons.

If you read the Auditor General's report, which I'm sure everyone in this Assembly has, you can clearly see in his report from October of 2010 where the Auditor makes some key recommendations to this government. In fact, I was surprised. I'm sure that under the minister of finance's watch we're going to see a budgeting process that's not going to be a repeat of what happened in previous years when, incredibly, Alberta Health Services with their \$8 billion plus budget had to work three times – three times – to finally get it right with their budget.

I heard yesterday the minister, and the minister was very, very defensive in trying to explain, unsuccessfully, the reasons why there was a \$500 million error between two ledgers and a \$420 million – it wasn't described as an error. It was described as a misclassification, I believe.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, those would be examples of what the Auditor General has had to say, and those comments in those reports only add to the suspicions of the public about this government and how they're managing health care and the dollars that are allocated to provide that essential service to sick Albertans.

When you look at all of this discussion, when you look at what the Auditor General has said, and then you look at the fiscal plan of this government, and you note at the very back in the small print of the fiscal plan that it is going to take the government until 2013 before they get their transition act in order with this Alberta Health Services one system of delivery across the province, essentially it's going to take them five years, Mr. Speaker, from the firing of the regional health authorities and the creation of the one superboard before they have a plan to manage their money. During that time, if you can believe the government's own budget documents, there will be well in excess of \$47 billion spent on public health care. I would point that out as one of the reasons why citizens don't have confidence in this government when it comes to managing health care.

Now, this \$2.2 billion amount that we're talking about in Bill 13 certainly is going to get the fiscal year off to a start, and we will see what happens. But year after year, Auditor's report after Auditor's report, there are flags going up, there are suggestions about how this money can be managed more effectively and more efficiently, but the government doesn't seem to be able to get it right.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, hopefully when Bill 13 is passed and the money is allocated to the appropriate ministries, this government will try once and for all to ensure that we are getting fair value for every dollar that is requested here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks on Bill 13 and cede the floor to another hon. member of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand up on Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011. My biggest concern on Bill 13 and the interim supply appropriation is that when this Premier came in, they were going to start having early sessions. We were going to get in here, we were going to have the government budget out early so that we could debate all these things. What this is is just poor planning, looking at extra work and having to double cover for the first month. Had we met earlier, gotten the budget out earlier, we could go through that, and we wouldn't need to go through the interim supply appropriation to ensure that we have a month of funding in order for all the programs to go in there.

What we kind of have is double jeopardy, every department wondering: "Well, okay. Are we going to get our interim supply appropriation? Yes, of course we are. But is it going to be good for the rest of the year?" The biggest comment is that what we need is a government that's efficient, that's effective, where all of the departments know the budgets months in advance, can have them debated, and have that consistency going forward.

Once again, it's just disappointing that we're having to spend the time to go through the interim supply appropriation because this government wasn't able to get its act together, to bring forward a budget in a timely manner, and to bring it in here to debate.

With that, I'll sit down, and we'll see if there's anybody else to speak on it.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask, please, a question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Are you concerned, sir, about the cost of information technology expenses within Alberta Health Services? In 2007 there was roughly \$180 million spent, and this has increased dramatically to 2011, where it's anticipated to be close to \$340 million. That is a significant increase. I'm wondering if you could shed some light on how this government is spending their money, particularly in health care. This is just one example where we see IT expenses going up and up and up. For instance, we saw in the media here the other day where there was a breach of information technology and the private information of some citizens was jeopardized.

Mr. Hinman: I really appreciate always the astuteness of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the details that he is able to focus on when he's going through all of the different money bills. Yes, it's a major alarm bell going off. Again I think this is all relative to the so-called centralization of this government. I've spoken with many different doctors' offices that were frustrated. I actually have gone to a clinic that specializes in radiology and the digital imagery that they're dealing with in having to upgrade and meet the government standard.

I think that when we look at technology, the Internet and it's ability, it's very interesting when we look at, you know, the big computers that were originally built and everybody having to have access to that big computer versus the current system of the Internet, where you can get wired into the smallest computer to the biggest server and it's all there. This government has made, I believe, a poor decision in wanting to basically be the master of all of the programs and saying that we're going to create them.

I mean, the gun registry is just another wonderful IT boondoggle on trying to manage all of this digital . . .

An Hon. Member: It's federal.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, it is federal. You guys seem to be following in the footsteps of some foolish decisions by centralized government, making big deals with big corporations. You have to wonder about the validity of it and what they're trying to accomplish in bringing these programs forward.

I'm very alarmed. I don't believe that they've gone in the right direction. Again what we're most vulnerable to right now is the loss of that information. I think your colleague from Edmonton-Centre asked some very good questions today on: what are they doing to have that secondary and tertiary involvement in these records, and how are we going to protect them? We've spent a lot of money for a system that is quite vulnerable at this point it seems, and we don't know if it's efficient and if the access is there. It's costing the different doctors, the different clinics a lot of money, to say that they have to buy into this program in order to be part of Alberta Health Services.

I hope that answers the hon. member's question.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it does.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair now shall put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Government Motions

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

Canadian Wheat Board Act

11. Mr. Hayden moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge all members of the Canadian House of Commons to pass Bill C-619, An Act to Amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act (notice of opting out and licence for activities), allowing western Canadian producers to opt out of participating in the Canadian Wheat Board, thereby giving Alberta farmers the choice to market their product as they choose.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move Government Motion 11. I believe it's imperative that I bring the attention of this Assembly to Bill C-619, which was recently introduced into the House of Commons. This bill will amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and will allow western Canadian wheat and barley producers the option to market their wheat and barley as they choose.

3:30

Currently farmers in Alberta and in other western provinces are obligated to sell their product through the Canadian Wheat Board only. They have no choice, Mr. Speaker. With this amendment, however, western producers will be given the choice to opt out of participating in the Canadian Wheat Board for a minimum of two years. Bill C-619 will bring parity to western farmers and will allow them the same marketing opportunities for wheat and barley as farmers in eastern Canada currently enjoy. Eastern Canadian farmers are able to freely market their wheat and barley as they choose.

Mr. Speaker, over the last several years the federal government has pursued changes to the marketing system for wheat and barley in western Canada. Some of the highlights are that in April 2007 the federal government proposed amendments to the Canadian Wheat Board regulations which would allow for marketing choice for barley, which would have taken effect August 1, 2007. However, before that could happen, on July 31, 2007, the Federal Court ruled in favour of the Canadian Wheat Board retaining its monopoly on barley marketing. The federal government subsequently appealed this decision, and in February 2008 the Federal Court of Appeal ruled against the federal government. Unfortunately, this reaffirmed the decision that barley cannot be removed from the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction without opening up the legislation.

In March 2008 the federal government introduced Bill C-46, An Act to Amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and Chapter 17 of the *Statutes of Canada, 1998*. Bill C-46 passed first reading in the House of Commons in March 2008 but subsequently died on the Order Paper when the Governor General dissolved the House of Commons in September 2008. In May 2010 the government of Canada introduced Bill C-27, the Canadian Wheat Board Payments and Election Reform Act. Unfortunately, once again the House of Commons adjourned for the summer before this bill made it past first reading.

Mr. Speaker, as of today western Canadian farmers are still waiting for the changes to be made. In 2007 the federal government's barley marketing plebiscite revealed that 62 per cent of farmers across western Canada and 78 per cent of Albertans are in favour of an open market for barley. It is clear that western Canadian farmers want choice. Our government strongly believes that

wheat and barley producers should have the right to freely market their own grain products however and to whomever they choose. International markets need our products. Farmers need competitive options for maximizing those marketing opportunities. Alberta's wheat and barley farmers make incredible investments and take great risk, but they do not have the freedom to market their products as they see fit.

Understandably, Mr. Speaker, they are frustrated. Marketing choice does not mean a dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board but, rather, a transition to an efficient and voluntary organization that effectively competes in an open market. Bill C-619 would allow farmers who opt out of the Canadian Wheat Board to opt back in if they so choose. Options are always good for Alberta producers, and this motion is a step in the right direction.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has certainly been, as has been pointed out, an extremely contentious issue over the last number of years. I'm not a farmer. I don't sell wheat, and I don't sell barley. As far as making a comment about whether it's a good idea or not, I don't think that I'm qualified to make that judgment. I know I've listened to both sides of the argument, but I think my problem over the years has been the process.

The Canadian Wheat Board is a duly elected board. I don't believe that either the federal government or any provincial government should be trying to bring in legislation through the back door or sideways to be able to change what an elected board has decided that they would do. There are appointments to the board, and I know that they have tried to get people elected that would be able to change it from inside, and that hasn't happened yet.

My whole problem with this is the process. I just heard a few moans when I bring this forward, but I think it's a democratic process that has to be questioned. Because an elected board or because people outside of that board can't get their own way, they go and have the government change the legislation or change the way that the board would operate. Clearly, the courts have not agreed with that premise either, with both of the decisions that had been spoken of previously.

Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and let others speak. Particularly, I want to of course hear from the farmers. I'm sure many in the House, from my understanding, are in support of having choice. That's fine, but the process still should not be through any level of government that interferes with a duly elected board.

The Deputy Speaker: I have on my list here the hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am a farmer, and I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Government Motion 11, which encourages all members of the House of Commons to support Bill C-619, an Act to Amend the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation has been a long time coming. For decades farmers in western Canada have been obligated to sell their wheat and barley to the Canadian Wheat Board whereas farmers in eastern Canada, as the minister has just stated, have been able to market their wheat and barley as they want. This two-tier system is unfair, and Alberta farmers deserve the same choice and freedoms as their eastern counterparts. Under this legislation farmers in western Canada would be able to opt out of participating in the Canadian Wheat Board by providing proper notice by April 1 of each year. Farmers that choose to opt out would then be able to sell their wheat and barley products to purchasers of their choice. For

many farmers this could mean more profit from sales of wheat and barley, but again it would be their choice.

I strongly support such a practice. It is a fundamental of the free market system that individuals and businesses are able to sell their products to whomever they choose, and this legislation will ensure farmers in western Canada are free to market their wheat and their barley as they like. After all, it's the farmers who work year-round to monitor and plant and harvest their crops, and these same farmers take on huge risks as the capital investment and time investment required are more than substantial. It is only right that in a free market economy farmers are able to be rewarded for their time and effort by marketing their product as they choose. Mr. Speaker, international markets need our products, and farmers should be able to take advantage of these international markets if they so desire.

Certainly, a small percentage of farmers have expressed concerns with this proposed legislation, but Bill C-619 will not end the Canadian Wheat Board. It will simply make participation in the board optional. This would allow the board to make a transition to an efficient, voluntary organization that competes in the open market. The Canadian Wheat Board would still serve the interests of those who choose to participate in it. Although some farmers are opposed to the change, the fact remains, as was mentioned, that 78 per cent of farmers support an open market for barley, as the 2007 barley plebiscite showed. We will stand up for these farmers' wishes so that they have access to the same markets as their counterparts in eastern Canada do.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support this motion. The current legislation and practice limits Alberta farmers' ability to market their products, once again, as they choose. Bill C-619 will ensure that Alberta farmers have the option to market their wheat and barley to a purchaser other than the Canadian Wheat Board. This act is imperative to maintaining free market principles for producers from all industries. We should support the wish of the majority of Alberta farmers – I stress the Alberta farmers in this for we are in Alberta – and encourage members of the House of Commons to support Bill C-619.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to rise today and have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-619 from the motion of the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. It's always good to speak to a motion like this because so often in this House, lately especially, we've been giving the government some, obviously, pretty heavy criticism on their handling of the health care file and the finance file and the land-use framework and other disastrous bills and initiatives that they've undertaken. So it's always nice to be able to stand up and lend full support as a member and as a caucus for a government motion that is completely appropriate and healthy for this province and will be a good thing for this province. I commend the minister of agriculture for bringing this motion forward.

You know, the biggest thing for me that this represents is choice. We can't cloud the fact that some folks will say: "Oh, the Canadian Wheat Board is elected. It's duly elected. Therefore, it's appropriate that we kind of leave it alone and just let it do its thing." The problem is that just because a body is elected does not mean that the way that it's constituted is right or is acceptable.

In this case the Canadian Wheat Board, essentially, is a board that forces our grain farmers to sell their wheat to it while their

competitors in other areas of the country, in eastern Canada, do not have that same mandatory requirement. It is, essentially, a western wheat board monopoly, and it's completely unacceptable and completely out of line with any principles of democracy or free markets or anything that I can imagine that our province would be based on principlewise.

Our caucus along with our leader, Danielle Smith, believe that wheat and barley farmers in western Canada must be provided with the same choices as wheat and barley farmers in Ontario or Quebec or anywhere else. This does not mean completely dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board but merely affording farmers the right to operate independently. The board could remain a producer-controlled entity providing the same services that it does today. Other jurisdictions, including Ontario and Australia, have successfully transitioned from a single-desk approach like the CWB to an open market.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board became mandatory for farmers during the Second World War so as to ensure a steady supply for the duration of the war. It has been 66 years since the war ended, for those keeping count, yet farmers are still subjected in our province to a monopoly that prevents them from choosing how best to maximize their profits. In 1996 numerous prairie farmers were arrested and subsequently tried and convicted in a court of law for simply trying to make a living. One of those, a constituent of the Minister of Transportation, Jim Chatenay, was hauled off to jail for having the audacity to sell his wheat to the United States. What an absolute travesty, frankly, what a pathetic joke that we would ever have our police officers arrest somebody and prosecute them under this act. Just ridiculous.

They were all sentenced to pay large and unjust fines as well. In protest some chose to spend a number of months in jail rather than pay, like Mr. Chatenay. In fact, one farmer was fined \$2,000 for donating a bushel of wheat – \$2,000 for donating a bushel of wheat – to a 4-H club in Montana. That was not even about profit. That farmer was simply trying to perform an act of charity for our neighbours to the south. That's how ridiculous and pathetic the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly had become.

In terms of international relations the Canadian Wheat Board has proven to be problematic baggage in trade negotiations. As a result of the board's monopoly and government-mandated price guarantees the United States views the Canadian Wheat Board as a subsidy and often mentions its dissolution as a condition for U.S. support. An even more alarming element is that the Algerian grain board has stated that they enjoy very low prices on Canadian wheat. This is at the direct expense of Canadian wheat farmers, that could find, clearly, higher prices elsewhere if they had the right to market their grains elsewhere.

It is true that some farmers support the Wheat Board because they believe they cannot market their grain effectively without it or because they believe the Canadian Wheat Board is getting a fair price on their behalf. There is also a concern that without the Canadian Wheat Board farmers might find themselves in a situation like that in the early part of the 20th century, when they were at the mercy of big agribusiness and the railroad monopolies. However, times have changed, and it is obvious to us that nonboard crops such as canola do not face this type of problem. The introduction of market forces can only benefit western farmers. Choice can only benefit western farmers.

We must realize that many western grain farmers are already transporting, selling, and exporting products not regulated by the Canadian Wheat Board such as canola, pulse crops, and oats. For them or any others this bill would simply give them the freedom to broaden their businesses' activities to include that of barley and wheat.

Obviously, I come from a 'rurban' constituency, as it's called. We have cities. We have the city of Airdrie, with about 40,000 people. We have Chestermere, with about 15,000 people, and we have about 15,000 people in Rocky View. Many of those folks are grain farmers, and I want to make sure that those farmers have the same opportunities as any other wheat and barley farmers across this nation to market their wheat to whomever they so choose.

I also want to make clear that the Wildrose and myself personally support still having the Canadian Wheat Board as an option – an option – a choice for farmers if they so choose to utilize it, but it should never be forced upon them. It's still ridiculous that we live in a country that forces this type of unjust monopoly on one region of the country, and I think that as Albertans we should stand up against it.

Fiscally measurable costs to farmers of the single-desk approach exist. According to one study they vary and could be as high as \$20 per tonne in any year for wheat. Taxpayers' costs could be another \$5 to \$6 per tonne. For barley growers the hidden costs of the board are larger than \$20 per tonne, and the taxpayer costs are approximately \$9 per tonne. All of that wasteful spending could be avoided.

Mr. Speaker, while our party rarely finds itself, obviously, in agreement with the government these days, I must congratulate the minister of agriculture, Drumheller-Stettler, on raising the profile of this important bill. I know it must be difficult for him to hear me agreeing with him so profusely and showing such praise, but he deserves it. I hope that this government will continue to push this file in ways like this to support our friends in the federal government in getting rid of this intrusive and unacceptable monopoly for our wheat and barley producers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this government motion as it relates to the bill in the House of Commons and to the Canadian Wheat Board. I rise to speak on this because it's been something that has been intertwined with my family and my business and my operations for some 25, 30 years now, and it's also been something that has been discussed a lot not only by previous ministers of agriculture, our current minister of agriculture but, certainly, producers in the province. I think it would be good to have a little bit of an historical perspective so that you would understand why this is close to my heart.

When the Canadian Wheat Board was created, it was created so that we could gather the product and prepare it for a time of war, really. It was also a time when we could originate the grain and bring it forward to the areas where that grain would be processed to reach other markets and to reach the consumer, and those processing areas were in eastern Canada. So it's no surprise that the Canadian Wheat Board's legislative mandate only applies to British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba but not to Ontario and Quebec or any other provinces. It was designed to move raw materials from the west to the east to be processed and then sent out to those markets, and at the time that probably seemed like a pretty good idea.

Then it morphed into – well, now we have the ability to have a single-desk seller. In the '40s, '50s, and '60s perhaps that was a

good idea because farmers were not as sophisticated in terms of managing their own hedge accounts, in terms of managing their own sales, in terms of finding that customer. Not many farmers in those days could have arranged the logistics of a small vessel to go to Mexico or a small vessel to go to the Ukraine or anywhere else in the world. Today times have changed, Mr. Speaker. Producers are doing those things. They are managing their own hedge accounts. They're managing their own currency evaluations. They're putting product in bags, and they're shipping it all over the world.

We were one of those producers, Mr. Speaker, in our operation. We would look to create a pearled barley product in western Canada because there was only one that was doing it, and we thought it would be a good idea. Then we thought: "Well, what about oats? Why not get into oats, oat processing, good old Quaker Oats? Why not do that?" In those days it wasn't the granola bar; that came a little bit later. We realized that the only processor or oats was actually located in Peterborough, Ontario, the Quaker Oats plant. There was a plant that was in Winnipeg but burned down the year that we were looking at it, so that would have been about the mid-80s. That plant was actually scheduled to be rebuilt in Ontario.

We started to do a little investigating to find out why those plants were there, and our first thought was that, well, it's because it's close to market: easier access to your market, easier access to the customer. What we discovered, to our chagrin, was that you had to sell all of your oats to the Wheat Board, then you had to buy it all back from the Wheat Board if you were within the Wheat Board zone.

That becomes a bit of a nightmare for a processor. Rather than deal with that nightmare, Mr. Speaker, the processor simply moved out of the jurisdiction and stayed in Canada, but they stayed in Ontario. It wasn't until oats were removed from the Canadian Wheat Board, very similar to the kind of process that we're talking about today, that processing of oats – the majority of the production of oats is in western Canada – started to happen in western Canada.

Today the majority of the production of oats for human consumption is done in western Canada, and there's a reason for that, Mr. Speaker. It's because we can buy directly from the producer. We can do research on varieties of oats that will increase our yield. There are a number of reasons why we want to be able to deal directly with the farmer. We're creating food product. We want to have a source of supply that is consistent. That made a tremendous difference to the food production value and the value-added chain in western Canada.

So why not barley? Why not wheat? It's a very interesting question. Why not? If you're not going to do it for just western Canada, why not, then, extend the Canadian Wheat Board to the rest of the country? In fact, Mr. Speaker, I suggested that to the federal government one time. The governments of Quebec and Ontario flatly refused to have anything to do with the Canadian Wheat Board. That should tell us something right away. A federal law should apply to all portions of Canada, not just our provinces.

International sales experiences that I've had over the last 25 years, prior to being elected to this honourable Chamber, told me that, yes, people dealt with the Canadian Wheat Board because they had to. But when I came to them – and we were doing transactions on canola, on oat products, on raw oats, on feed oats, on various other products – they appreciated the fact that they could deal directly with an Alberta customer and an Alberta client in providing that product.

I had the interesting experience in a previous portfolio, Mr. Speaker, of sitting down and talking to one of the largest brewery

companies owned by a family in the world. I was talking to one of their executives, who happened to be one of the sons of the owner. They had just recently built a brand new malting plant in a state directly south of us. I asked them why they didn't build it in Alberta. We grow some of the best barley in the world. They said: well, this way we can deal with your single-desk seller, but we can do all of the contract growing and the research directly with the farmers in the United States. That's a tremendous loss to the producers of Alberta, and it's one we will never get back, and it's one of the reasons why I believe choice is an absolute necessity for western Canada. It's an absolute necessity for our producers, and it's an absolute necessity for our market.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere mentioned the international trade issues that the Canadian Wheat Board brings up, and they do. As a previous minister in charge of the WTO file I had the opportunity to sit in a room and listen to other members of the WTO tell us that the Canadian Wheat Board being a choice would go a long way in advancing Canada's position in the trade talks. That was then. Perhaps it's different now, Mr. Speaker; I'm not there. But I can tell you that it's an irritant that needn't be there because it would benefit us as much as it would benefit Canada and the rest of the WTO.

The global food markets are changing. They're not the same as they were when we developed the Canadian Wheat Board. The environment that the Canadian Wheat Board developed in is not the same. The voting mechanisms that are in place today are not relevant to the type of production that producers in western Canada do. It's time, Mr. Speaker, that we finally deal with this, and I fully support the federal government's proposal to create choice in the Canadian Wheat Board. I, too, would not like to see the Canadian Wheat Board gone. I would like to see it run like a grain company but not like a subsidized grain company.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment or questions. The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As somebody who's actually just received a cheque for some durum that I sold, I'm at a loss to understand. I know the experience that the former speaker has had both as a minister and as a marketing agent in international trade. Why would it be an advantage to stay in a system involuntarily because it's duly elected and I'm part of a zone that covers Saskatchewan and Alberta, where there's a variation of freight rates? Why is it advantageous for me to stay in a system where it costs me \$1.35 a bushel to ship grain to a point artificially, that never went there, when I only get \$3.60 a bushel back?

Mr. Horner: Well, I think the hon. member answered his own question, Mr. Speaker. I think that what we have to recognize – I go back to what I said before – is that the producers that we have today are considerably more sophisticated in how we do business in the grain industry than ever before. They have the knowledge about freight rates. They have the knowledge about what it takes to load the car. They have the knowledge about what it takes to market that car.

There are agents and brokers that are working very closely with producers today on other grains, and canola is the best example of this that one could look at. If you're going to look at marketing your canola and the returns that producers have received on canola even in times of price distress, there's no pool. There's no interest rate recovery. There's no prepayment. It's based on what the pro-

ducer does and what he does with his partner in marketing. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the returns for those producers have been considerably more. They've had the choice of whom they deal with and to whom they sell it, and when they do the selling, their returns have been much better.

There is no advantage, in answer to the hon. member's question.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. member as the recent Minister of Advanced Education and Technology – well, I'm not wondering. I know he's aware of a plant and pilot project in south Edmonton that produces a sugar-type substance from a natural source, particularly starch. I wonder if the hon. member would care to comment on the difficulty for people who want to start plants like that here of acquiring a direct source of starch in the neighbourhood, with people having to sell their product to the Wheat Board and then have it bought back?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, imagine if you were the company that wanted to get rolling and you had a great idea. You took – well, I don't know – let's say, barley, and you figured out a way to take the aleurone layer out of barley, to separate only that piece out, and it had some very interesting properties. Maybe you weren't even going to use it for food, but you might use it for food and pharmaceuticals. So you go to a group of farmers, and you say: "I want you to grow a particular type of barley for me. I want a particular weight and protein, I want a particular moisture, and I want it delivered at particular times throughout the year because my process is going to be steady, but perhaps I'll only need a little bit at a time." Fabulous. You find a farmer. You think that's great. Then uh-uh. The Wheat Board comes in and says: "No, no. He has to sell it to me. Then you come to me, and we'll tell you what the price is." Then there's no guarantee that the producer is going to be able to keep his product separate from anybody else's that the board might be buying that day.

It's an impediment, Mr. Speaker, to the creation of value chains within our province on either new and innovative starches or new and innovative foods or, in fact, new and innovative pharmaceuticals. In some cases I know of companies that have been importing product that is, actually, within the purview of the Canadian Wheat Board, but they've simply disguised it as a soup base or some other base and then used that product because it was cheaper, actually, than going and getting it from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Speaker, this is just simply something that was designed in its infancy to create raw commodities moving eastward to process in eastern Canada, and it's never left that situation. We need to provide choice to companies and producers who want to create new products.

The Deputy Speaker: Twenty-five seconds under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening to the hon. members speak about Government Motion 11, and I've found the speeches certainly interesting. This is an issue that doesn't seem to go away, and I'm confident that it's not going to go away any time soon. Of course, that's the issue of what role the Canadian Wheat Board should play in the marketing of wheat and barley, mostly in western Canada.

Now, certainly, we've heard a historical perspective on all of this from a previous speaker. We know that in the past there have been efforts made through Agriculture and Rural Development to support the side, of course. The side on this issue that the government is supporting through the Alberta Grains Council and others is that we need to offer this supposed choice option, that farmers want more choice.

Well, farmers should decide and have decided in the past across B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba what they would like, and I think we should leave it at the direction of the farmers. They can vote. I certainly read – and I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at it – a recent feature in the *Globe and Mail* on the Wheat Board and the politics around the Wheat Board with the provinces and with the federal government.

Now, certainly, the federal government has changed some of the rules recently regarding appointments to the Wheat Board, and I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that the city of Winnipeg should for sure have two things, the Jets and the corporate headquarters of the Canadian Wheat Board.

An Hon. Member: Why? Are you from Winnipeg?

Mr. MacDonald: No. Those are two things that I'm confident Winnipeg should have. They also have – and I'm not going to get into that, hon. member – very competitive electricity rates. But I'm not going to go there.

Mr. Danyluk: You ought to move.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm not going to move, but industry is going to move from this province, hon. minister, because of this government's mismanagement of our electricity file. Low-cost electricity is going to attract a lot of industry from Alberta, unfortunately, to Manitoba.

Now, when you look at how the composition of the Canadian Wheat Board has changed, obviously, the federal government that we have now wants to see significant changes. Many MPs elected from western Canada certainly want to see significant changes.

I think the farmers' interests would be much better served if there was an effort made to change some of the unfair trade laws. We have spoken on that issue in this Assembly in the past, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there are many countries which have unusually high tariffs on many of our agricultural products, including wheat and including barley. I heard an hon. member talk earlier about the World Trade Organization and what would happen or what could happen or what might happen if the Wheat Board's wings were clipped, so to speak. I would like to urge the hon. minister of agriculture to stand up and defend the farmers in this province and their interests in places like South Korea, where they have up to an 80 per cent tariff on agricultural products from this area.

Hon. members previous to me had spoken about all the trade and the trade patterns from the pioneer days to Ontario and to Quebec. Well, the trade patterns are now going west to the Asian markets. That's why I would encourage this government and the federal government to try once and for all to reduce some of those tariffs in many of the markets in the Far East, where there is a growing population and people are moving from rural areas to urban areas to participate in the industrialization of their economies. Of course, they're not growing their own food, so naturally one would assume that this is a fine place to source that food. That is what I would like to see this government do.

I find it interesting to hear the Wildrose Party's take on this Government Motion 11. When I first read it, hon. members, I just assumed that this massive majority had read the latest polling

numbers, where in rural Alberta the Wildrose, if they're not number one, are a strong second and coming up. I thought that this was just political mischief by this government, who knows they're in trouble where their power base is and are trying to protect the last remnants of their vote from this party. I originally saw Government Motion 11 as a political move to try to convince rural Alberta that this government was standing up and speaking out on behalf of their interests.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

4:10

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is very simple. The hon. member had a lot of discussion about individuals leaving Alberta and that they were leaving Alberta partially, I believe his innuendo was, because of the high electricity costs. So when the hon. member talked about this province having higher electricity costs than other provinces, going to the comments about Manitoba, I just want to know if he took into consideration the data that right now Manitoba has between \$7 billion and \$8 billion debt against electricity costs or their energy production and also that a planned modernization, or I can call it an upgrade, is estimated to cost \$18 billion. Is he taking that into account in the cost of electricity?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the hon. minister for the question. The first thing I would like to correct in the minister's assumptions is that I didn't say individuals; I said businesses. There are already businesses that are so frightened and so upset at the cost of electricity and the uncertainty of the market here with our power that they're looking at relocating to Manitoba because they have low electricity costs, including businesses that are currently sited in Lethbridge, because businesses cannot afford to pay the power bills that this government has created as a result of deregulation.

Now, regarding Manitoba's debt I don't know how this hon. member could stand up and make that statement when this government has now forced up to \$14 billion onto the bills of consumers of electricity in this province, whether they're residential or whether they're commercial or industrial users, to pay for the expanded infrastructure system that you're promoting through your land grabs through your bills. Think of what you said. Because of electricity deregulation here, we now have an infrastructure deficit which has to be paid by the consumers of this province. We, too, have a deficit.

Mr. Danyluk: Who else is going to pay for it?

Mr. MacDonald: Who else? Well, certainly the generators, hon. member. In fact, it was your government that arbitrarily and behind closed doors changed the regulatory decision made to share the cost 50 per cent between generators and consumers. Behind closed doors this government decided that consumers would foot the whole bill, which is \$14 billion. So, please, don't compare yourself to Manitoba.

Mr. Danyluk: You did. You did.

Mr. MacDonald: Manitoba is a well-run, well-managed province and on occasion changes governments to New Democrats, to Conservatives.

Mr. Danyluk: Answer the question.

Mr. MacDonald: I am answering the question. You asked me to answer the question, sir, and I'm answering it. You might not like the answer.

Mr. Danyluk: You didn't answer the question. So the answer is no.

Mr. MacDonald: Please don't interrupt.

When you talk about deficits, and you pluck a number out of the air from Manitoba, I would ask you to consider the electricity deficit that you and your government have created as a result of electricity deregulation.

I appreciate the discussion on electricity deregulation, Mr. Speaker, even though we are talking about Government Motion 11, which is to promote the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 35 seconds left. In 35 seconds?

Mr. Lund: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: I would like to ask the hon. member: who all is able to vote for the board of the Canadian Wheat Board? Who is allowed to vote?

Mr. MacDonald: If you sit down, I'll answer the question.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Every time there's a vote, this government has had suggestions and, certainly, the federal government has had suggestions as to who should vote. It's a selective vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Now we get back to the motion. I have a long list of speakers here: the hon. members for Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Fish Creek, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Rocky Mountain House, Calgary-Glenmore, Little Bow, Calgary-Bow, and Red Deer-South.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to rise and add my comments to the debate on Government Motion 11, which urges all members of the House of Commons to support and pass Bill C-619.

I realize that this is a federal issue, but it has serious implications to farmers, especially farmers in the prairie provinces. Bill C-619 would bring parity to western farmers, allowing them the same marketing opportunities for wheat and barley as farmers in eastern Canada. I believe that wheat and barley producers should have the right to choose how and to whom they market their grain products.

The Canadian Wheat Board has had a monopoly on marketing wheat grown in western Canada since 1943. The government at that time made selling wheat through the board mandatory to ensure or to guarantee that we'd have a supply of wheat to Europe during the war years. This may have been a good idea in 1943, but we are living in a different world now, and it is time to change this monopoly, which only affects western farmers, to reflect the realities of 2011. Changing the current monopoly will lead to increased innovation in secondary and tertiary processing in the wheat and

barley industries. This is what our maltsters and other value-adders need to be competitive in the 21st century.

I want to just talk about how it affects people in my area. Rahr Malting in Alix is in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka. It is a large malting plant. It's the largest single-cell malting plant in the world, and it's located in central Alberta because of the availability of the best malting barley in the world. To access barley, they can contract with local farmers, but it has to be done through the Wheat Board.

When the farmer delivers their grain directly to the malt plant, the plant has a couple of options for paying the farmer. They can pay part of the money directly to the farmer, and there is a fee paid to the Wheat Board as well. The other option is to pay the full amount to the Wheat Board, and the Wheat Board will keep their portion of the fee and send the balance of the payment to the farmer at some other time, at a much later date and after some pooling costs and other costs are deducted from this fund. Either way, the farmer is paying a fee to the Wheat Board, which comes off his bottom line or the bottom line of Rahr, you know, if Rahr pays more money for the wheat in order to get it from the farmer.

The problem with this is that often the charges from the balancing pool that the Wheat Board keeps are for demerge on ships or other costs that have absolutely nothing to do with delivery of the barley to the malting plant. Neither the farmer nor the malster receive any services from the Wheat Board for the marketing or transportation of their product. In fact, the very fact that Rahr has to contract with the Wheat Board makes it more difficult for them to contract with their customers as well.

Currently the Wheat Board fees being collected at the Rahr plant, right in Alix, are between half a million to a million dollars a year. Year after year not only in Alix but in every grain-processing plant in western Canada millions and millions of dollars are being paid to the Wheat Board in fees, and the farmers have no choice of where they market their grain. There are good examples of marketing choice in other jurisdictions around the world, and good models have been developed in Canada. I would encourage everyone to support Government Motion 11.

In fact, one of the models for marketing has been developed right here in Red Deer, I think, with the Chambers of Commerce, and one of our hon. members, Red Deer-South, was part of that process to develop that model. This is the kind of model that needs to be promoted so that farmers in western Canada have that same parity.

I would ask all members here in our Legislature to support the motion and speak to Members of Parliament to support Bill C-619 so that it will eventually lead to marketing choice for all farmers in Canada, which is absolutely critical to the future success of not only our farmers but to the processing industry in Canada.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

4:20

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and support this motion. Everybody will know that this is a true urban girl, with very little rural background. I was honoured to have a rural buddy, when I was making my way through the Legislature, in the Member for Rocky Mountain House, who decided to take me under his wing and teach me about all of the rural issues and all the farm issues that I think were important. I was lucky to be able to have his expertise as I

became a little bit of an expert on some of the rural issues. I had grandparents that were farmers, but they ended up in Saskatchewan, moving to the city.

I do not have a lot of rural expertise, but I've been lucky to have some expertise, including my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore. In recent developments, being a member of the Wildrose, you learn very quickly as you travel the province and talk to people in the rural areas because there are only four of us plus our leader. I'm pleased to stand up and support the government motion.

I think what I've learned is that farming is extremely hard work that is fraught with risk. Grains are, obviously, sensitive to the weather, and finding the right balance is always a tough task. The weather can be too hot. It can be too cold. It can be too wet. It can be too dry. If someone is going to take risks and work hard, they need to be rewarded, and they need to know that they will enjoy the fruits of their labour. This is why the government motion calls on all Members of Parliament to pass federal Bill C-619. It will allow farmers to opt out of the Canadian Wheat Board. I think the bill is quite reasonable to all sides in that it lets farmers opt out of the board in a timely and orderly fashion so that farmers that choose to remain in the pool are not negatively affected.

Because so few Albertans today work on a farm, they have a tough time relating to agriculture issues, but I always like to try to dig a little deeper and put the issues in context. I've always asked a few questions. My colleague from Rocky Mountain House knows that. My colleague from Calgary-Glenmore knows that I ask a lot of questions. They're pretty simple questions, but when you're an urban girl – my colleague laughs at me because he's been very, very kind in helping me through the process of some of the agriculture issues that I don't quite understand. As he explained to me one day, there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers. He's been very patient. As I explained, I like to dig a little deeper, and I put the issues in context, and I've asked a lot of questions.

For those farmers who have refused to abide by the Wheat Board, who felt like they have worked so hard and have their efforts controlled by someone else, there have been severe consequences for disobeying the Wheat Board's monopoly. As has been mentioned in the House, in 1996 a Manitoba farmer was tired of having his grain sold by the CWB. He decided to take some of his harvest across the border and sell it in the United States, and because of what he did, he spent five months in prison. If you grow barley or wheat, you must sell it to the CWB. It's up to them to market and distribute the grain. No one else can. Imagine owning a bakery or a greenhouse and having to sell your hard work to someone at a flat price. If you don't, they'll throw you in prison.

Throughout my career I've always asked myself: what are the priorities of Albertans? If you take the time to meet face to face with Albertans and truly listen to them, they will not tell you they want the government investigating farmers for selling their products. Albertans want the government going after drug dealers for selling their products. They want pimps to be in prison, and they want prostitutes getting the help that they need. Albertans want safe streets. They want to know that when someone is convicted of a crime, they will pay their debt to society, not be released early for being nice in prison.

Albertans also know that resources are limited. There are only so many dollars to go around. Priorities have to be questioned here. We need the police on the street. We need violent criminals off the street. We need hard-working farmers on their fields. We want the hard-working farmers feeding Albertans and growing not just grains but the Alberta economy.

We will, as has been mentioned before, support Government Motion 11. We think all members of the House of Commons should pass Bill C-619, and I think that with this government mo-

tion on the floor today it sends a strong message that we support our Alberta farmers, and we want them to have the choice to market their products as they choose.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to rise and speak in support of Motion 11, urging the federal government to pass Bill C-619. I think this is an important bill, and I think it brings choice and balance to this debate. I acknowledge to this Assembly that I have many friends and associates in my constituency who are strong supporters of the Wheat Board, and I respect their views. The thing I like about this bill is that it protects their right to keep the Wheat Board because those who want choice would have to opt out, stay out for two years, and then would have to be given a year to get back in. I think this is a good bill and would satisfy many of the concerns.

I want to make a couple of points today, Mr. Speaker, and the first point I want to make is that monopolies do not create a healthy business climate. They do not encourage free enterprise and free markets, some principles that I espouse totally. Under the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly the western farmer has been the loser. There are no incentives to cut inefficiencies, no competition to encourage better returns to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just share a brief story with the Assembly which I've shared before, but I think it's worth repeating. It's from Don Baron's book *Canada's Great Grain Robbery*. He tells some stories about some wild hogs in Horseshoe Bend. I believe this story makes some points that are relevant in this debate.

The story is told that

years ago there lived a herd of wild hogs in a great horseshoe bend down a river deep in the southern United States. Where those hogs came from no one knew. But they survived floods . . . freezes, droughts and hunters. They were so wild the greatest compliment a man could pay to a dog was to say it had fought the hogs in Horseshoe Bend and returned alive. Occasionally a [hog] was killed either by dogs or a gun – and became a conversation piece for years.

One day, a lean-faced man came by the country store on the river road and asked the whereabouts of these wild hogs. He drove a one-horse wagon, had an axe, some blankets and a lantern, a pile of corn and a single-barrelled shotgun. He was a slender, slow-moving man who chewed his tobacco deliberately and spat very seldom.

Several months later he came back to the store and asked for help to bring those wild [hogs] out of the swamp. He said he had them all in a pen.

Bewildered citizens all gathered together to go view the captive hogs in Horseshoe Bend and wanted to know what happened.

"It's all very simple," said the patient lean-faced man. "First, I put out some corn for them. For three weeks they wouldn't eat it. Then some of the young ones grabbed a cob and ran off into the bush. Soon, they were all eating corn. Then I commenced building a pen around the corn, just a little higher every day. When I noticed they had stopped grubbing for acorns and roots and were all waiting for me to bring the corn, I built the trap door.

"Naturally they raised quite a ruckus when they seen they was trapped. But I can pen any animal on the face of the earth if I can just get him to depend on me for a handout."

In view of my comments about free enterprise, choice, and not having others be responsible for us, I think this story makes a good point.

The other point I'd like to make today, Mr. Speaker, briefly, is that I have constituents who years ago wanted to add value to their wheat by milling it into flour. It was a good idea, and as the former minister of agriculture pointed out to us, you know, it would have worked. It would have brought business and jobs to our area. But because of the Wheat Board monopoly and because they couldn't market their own wheat and had to sell it to the Wheat Board, who would then sell it back, the economics didn't work.

You know, I think the point needs to be made here that this is a monopoly. Monopolies are against competition, against free enterprise, so I am very much supportive of this bill and of choice.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I hate to wreck the party here, but I don't think I'm going to be supporting this motion. That may not be a great surprise for hon. members. I want to just indicate that I believe that the bill that is being introduced in the House of Commons by Bruce Stanton of Simcoe North – that is, Bill C-619 – would allow farmers to opt out of having to market their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board. I believe that the present circumstance is far more preferable and far more democratic, to allow the Wheat Board to make that decision and to continue to allow the farmers to elect their own representatives to the board of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Now, it's interesting to me that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner acknowledged that many of his friends, many of his constituents favour the Wheat Board. I find that this is actually a fairly widespread situation. I do in fact get out to rural areas and talk to people and talk to farmers, and it's clear to me that this government's position and the federal government's position, the Tories in Ottawa, do not represent necessarily even a majority of wheat and barley farmers in Canada or in Alberta. I note that in the last election to the Wheat Board four of five directors that were elected took a pro single-desk position, and the one that was re-elected in the Peace Country was re-elected very narrowly. This is fairly typical of these elections.

Now, I know that some hon. members are going to say, "Well, you know, it's just the small hobby farmers and so on that outvote the big corporate farms and so on," but I don't buy it. In fact, not so long ago, when the minister was Chuck Strahl, the federal government had 20,000 people removed from the voters list in that campaign. They were deemed ineligible for such reasons as not having delivered grain in the past two years or not having produced enough wheat and so on. Those people have been removed from the voters list, but we still see a situation where despite repeated interference from the federal government and repeated urging of this government, the farmers continue to elect people that will represent them.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are some different interests at play here among farmers. In my opinion, the corporate farms or the very large producers have the resources, they believe, to market their own barley and cut their own deals. But I think the majority of farmers, being middle and small farmers, benefit from

the single desk, and I think that's why they regularly elect the pro single-desk directors.

Now, there are people or interests in the United States and in the European Union, some of our biggest competitors, who would dearly love to see the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board. I think that what would happen is that it would accelerate the loss of the family farm, of small farms, and it would tend to increase the rate at which there was a concentration of ownership in fewer and fewer hands.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this Legislature should instead oppose Bill C-619 and support the democratic right of wheat and barley farmers to make their own decisions with respect to this matter. I know that the argument is being made that we're not going to get rid of the Wheat Board. It will continue; we'll just let farmers opt out. Well, of course, it will be the biggest farmers that will opt out, the ones that produce a lot of the grain, and it will seriously weaken the position of the rest of the farmers that want to participate in the Wheat Board. It's a way of undermining and eventually rendering irrelevant the Canadian Wheat Board.

This has been tried, Mr. Speaker, in Australia, and it was not a success. It has not been a success there. It's just that the Conservative government in Canada and the Conservative government in Alberta have tried a number of different approaches to get rid of the single desk. The approach they're taking now is to say: "Well, we'll keep the Wheat Board. It'll still market your wheat if you want to participate." The big guys or anyone who wants can leave. The big guys, of course, will, and the ability of the Wheat Board to market grain and get a good price for the people participating will be diminished, so I don't think that we should support this motion.

I think, Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, that I don't accept this government's repeated attempts to try and eliminate the single desk. They're acting for a smaller group of agricultural producers and not for the small operator, not for the family farm, and it's not something that we're prepared to support. We believe that most wheat and barley farmers do want to retain the single desk.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment or questions. The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the hon. member mentioned the elected board and that there were four out of five that supported the Wheat Board. I would be curious to know the criteria. Who all could vote for the members of the board? If the hon. member would answer that question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar dodged it and didn't answer. I don't think he knows.

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

Mr. Lund: If he knows, then I would hope that he would answer.

The Deputy Speaker: You want to raise a point of order right now?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) – and that's certainly reflected in the standing orders – I would ask the hon. member to withdraw that comment that he made regarding my exchange with him earlier because that simply is not true, and the hon. member knows it.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be only too happy to withdraw it, but I would have thought that he would answer if he knows.

I will redirect the question to the person that I was asking the question to in the first place.

The Deputy Speaker: So you have withdrawn your comment?

Mr. Lund: Yes, I've withdrawn it.

Mr. MacDonald: Further, to clarify that, Mr. Speaker, I didn't even have time to finish because the clock had run out. There was a five-minute . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you raised a point of order. The hon. member has withdrawn the comment, so we'll continue on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Well, I'm happy to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar some of my time if he wants to answer the question. I was hoping he'd help me out, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's a trick question.

I'm not familiar with the specific requirement, but I know that farms who produce one tonne of grain or more are eligible for a ballot, and I know that some farms receive several, but incorporated farms only receive one. If the hon. member can further enlighten me and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that would be great.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have a question for the hon. member. He very explicitly talked about that wheat and barley farmers should have control of their position or, if I can interpret, their destiny and have the opportunity to vote. He also made mention that the hon. Strahl took out 20,000 producers. Well, if I can just ask him because it contradicts your statements: does he really believe that if you are not in the wheat and barley production, you should have the eligibility to vote on something that you have nothing to do with?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, I know that farmers change crops, and they are affected by droughts and other weather conditions and so on, so I'm sure there is some variability in who's eligible. Perhaps the system doesn't fully reflect that. I don't know.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as long as an individual is able to take out a permit book, regardless if he has production that year or not, he's able to vote, and that is a continuing process that takes place. Just to make that blanket statement is completely erroneous.

Mr. Horner: I just wanted to pose a quick question to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. If you had a group of small family farms in the province of Alberta – and I would hope someone would define for me one day what a family farm is. Let's say you had a group of them together. They were wheat growers, and they wanted to start their own flour mill. Would you be opposed to the fact that they could combine their production of, say, five or six families into a nice little co-operative, which I'm sure the hon. member would support, and have their wheat flow into there without any interference by any other force, create a flour, and sell it into the marketplace? Would you be opposed to that, hon. member?

Mr. Mason: I would think it would be great to establish that kind of co-operative, and I'm sure that the Wheat Board would be happy to supply them with all they wanted.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if the Wheat Board were to decline such an opportunity for those farmers, if the Wheat Board were to say, "No, you cannot; you must sell it to me first, and we'll add on what we want and sell it right back to you," would you be opposed to that, hon. member?

Mr. Mason: I just said: they could buy the wheat that they wanted from the Wheat Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Can we get back to the motion? The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for bringing this forward and giving us an opportunity to discuss it and to send a clear message to the legislators in Ottawa about the inequity that many of us have to face out here simply because of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Now, I want to make it very clear that years back the Canadian Wheat Board served a very good function. Back in those days we used to produce and take it to the gate and expect somebody else to pick it up and market it. But those things have changed.

In fairness to the Wheat Board, they have made some baby steps in opening up. I can remember when we couldn't even sell some of our feed grain to a neighbour without processing it first. If we processed it, then we could do it legally. Of course, there was grain changing hands. Seed grain could also, but it was very small quantities that you could do.

I think there are a couple of things we need to get on the record. One, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East commented about the court ruling. The court ruling wasn't that the federal government couldn't change it. They had to change their legislation before they could do it, and that was the ruling. They couldn't do it the way they wanted. They had to change the legislation first.

This question that I was asking the two members about: who was eligible to vote for the board members? You have to have delivered grain. I don't remember the exact quantity, but I believe it was something like 40 tonnes that you had to deliver before you could get a ballot, and you had to prove that you'd done that. Just having a permit wasn't good enough.

The comments about the minister removing a number: that was because they simply were not delivering grain to the Canadian Wheat Board. We tried to get a ballot this last time, this last election, but we couldn't because we hadn't delivered. We stopped growing grains that we had to sell through the Canadian Wheat Board.

Now, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert commented about a maltster that he talked to. When I was minister of agriculture, we also had a large pasta manufacturer that wanted to establish here in Alberta, but when he learned about the problems that they were going to have to go through with the Canadian Wheat Board, I believe it was North Dakota that they ended up building their plant in. That's because of the hassle to go through the Canadian Wheat Board. You've got an interim step there that costs money. It adds no value, but it's a cost to the producer.

I remember talking to the owners of the malt plant in Alix, that the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka talked about. From our farm we were shipping two cars of malt, two-row barley, and it was going to Thunder Bay. He was telling me that he was getting some two-row barley, a similar variety even, and it was coming from Manitoba to Alix. So loaded cars are meeting. Well, guess

who pays for that? The farmer does. That was all because the Canadian Wheat Board also steps in if it's a maltster. You can sell feed barley – you can't sell it outside of the country; you can sell it in the country – but you can't sell malting.

Now, there's another side effect to all of this that I want to mention, and that is that in the processing and malting there are certain characteristics that the maltster wants. When you think about contracting directly with a farmer to get the exact kind of qualities, some of the qualities that you want, the maltsters are prepared to spend a lot of money on research to get the product that they want and then would of course contract back directly to the producer. So there's a huge advantage.

Now, it's kind of ironic, I guess, that we're discussing this today because one of the things that the Canadian Wheat Board does – and we're not trying to get rid of it – is they do have an initial payment, that when you deliver, you'll get that payment. Today and yesterday the grain market has been just plummeting, so those of us that won't ship through the Wheat Board, of course, we're losing quite a bit of money these last two days. It'll come back, but it does fluctuate. So that's something.

Things have changed now that we've got the Internet all through the rural area. I know on our farm we're looking at those prices hourly and watching where they're going, watching the trends, and have the ability to phone in or e-mail to the buyer, and out comes a contract, sign the contract, send it back, and that's how the system works. But if you're going to go through the Wheat Board, you've first got to sign a contract.

4:50

I can tell you right today that there is a huge problem developing. There is a large grain purchaser at Joffre. The Canadian Wheat Board had a contract that they put out for wheat back in the fall, and it actually was a pretty good price compared to what they had been paying, a long ways from the \$8 that was in Chicago, but it was not too bad. That plant at Joffre: there were a million tonnes that had been contracted through there. They haven't delivered one bushel yet. Here we are in the middle of March, and the crop year ends, of course, the end of July. We don't know what's going to happen to all of those contracts. I guess the board will take it sometime, but the poor farmer is now stuck with that on his property. He can't move it, and he's got no cash flow, so he's got another big problem, and it's all because we don't have choice.

If you're going to grow that kind of product and sell it, you're going to have to go through the board. On our farm we've just stopped growing those products. We've gone to canola, a little bit of oats now that oats are out of the board, peas, and, of course, feed barley. The board has outlived its usefulness.

Another thing where it was handy for the federal government was the floor price. At times the floor price had been set too high, so the federal government would step in and cover the shortfall. That disappeared – I don't know – 10, 12 years ago, so there is no advantage there.

One of the other things that they did, though, to help eastern Canada and to keep the farmers down there quiet was the Crow rate. They would take feed grain from western Canada, ship it down to Ontario, and we would have to ship our feeder cattle down there to eat the grain that was grown here in Alberta. It makes absolutely no sense. But that's gone, thank goodness.

I would urge all members to support this motion so that we can send a very strong message to our colleagues in Ottawa. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Mr. Mason: I appreciated the hon. member's comments. When I talk to farmers, what I hear is the tremendous difference between the input costs that they have to pay, so for their fuel, their fertilizer, and a number of things – all of their input costs keep going up, and they can't control those. Then the price they receive for what they produce doesn't cover their input costs or doesn't leave them any margin. Of course, people work now at multiple jobs just to keep the farms going. My question to the hon. member is: does he not see some role for marketing boards in helping the farmers get a return that will cover their input costs plus a reasonable margin?

Mr. Lund: Don't confuse this with a marketing board or supply management. Oh, I shouldn't say that because, really, what the Wheat Board does is it prevents you from forward contracting and all of those things, so in some ways, yeah, it's supply management. Your supply of opportunity is diminished because you've got to go through the Wheat Board.

The input costs: yes, that's a problem. But I don't know what kind of board you're talking about that would be able to solve that problem. There's everything from your machinery to your labour costs to your fuel costs, and the list goes on.

One of the things, of course, that's really going to cause a problem for us is all of the so-called climate change/clean stuff. We bought a tractor a year ago, partly to get ahead of what's coming. Diesel motors now all will have a thing on them where they put urea into the exhaust, which is supposed to clean it up. It does nothing for the efficiency of the motor. It does nothing to reduce your costs. As a matter of fact, it increases it. The tractor that I'm familiar with costs around \$300,000. With this urea thing on, it's an additional \$30,000.

Another thing that's coming up, the biofuels. They're not as efficient as our low-sulphur diesel, so that's going to be an additional cost.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood to comment.

Mr. Groeneveld: I assume time is short, but I would just like the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House to comment to help some people with the voting process, dealing with the fact that so many of our young people that have gotten out of the barley and wheat business because of the Wheat Board don't have a permit book anymore, have no ability to vote, and wouldn't even if they could right now. Would you comment on that?

Mr. Lund: Thanks, hon. member. I made the comment that we on our farm were wanting to get an opportunity to vote because this time we could have voted for somebody that was wanting to implement change and give the farmers the opportunity, but by the time we would apply for the permit and deliver the grain, it was too late. They mail out the ballot – archaic, but that's the way they do it – and we just missed out on the opportunity.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour today to rise and speak in support of Government Motion 11 and to talk about the importance of Bill C-619 at the federal level and how that will really, I feel, if passed federally, be a boost to agriculture here in the province of Alberta. It's a great opportunity – and I've enjoyed the discussion so far in the House here – to talk about the importance of choice, to talk about the importance of the free market.

I guess I just want to start by referring back to the principles of prosperity and where that root is. It's never been rooted in a government that wants to regulate an industry. We can look at many of the Eastern bloc countries, where government stepped in and confiscated the land and redistributed it amongst the citizens and said: you can have stewardship over this land, but we're going to be the ones to tell you what and where and how and when to grow your crops. Those people, basically, were put into a situation where they couldn't even feed themselves, and they had to import grain from such great countries as Canada, the U.S., Australia, where the free market was somewhat allowed and agricultural producers were efficient and could produce for their own benefit.

I think that one of the things that we've maybe got a little bit off on in this discussion is that we've talked against the Canadian Wheat Board. I must, again, agree. In my previous life I was a farmer. I can't remember if it was in 1989 that I quit. I was so disgusted that I never renewed my permit book and went straight off Canadian Wheat Board grains so that I wouldn't have to deal with them because I was so frustrated with them. They were one of the reasons that I actually got involved in politics, along with many other government restrictions that didn't allow for myself as an individual to be an entrepreneurial businessman, that I wanted to be. I invested in a hay-cubing plant way back then so that we could start exporting and growing our hay. There have just been many aspects.

5:00

The important thing is that Bill C-619 is not an attack on the Wheat Board. What it does is that you're allowed you to opt out. It's an option. Let's say that 80 per cent of Alberta farmers did want to stay with the Canadian Wheat Board. It's there for them. This isn't an attack, to say that we're going to destroy it; we're going to take it away. Thou shalt not grow grain for the Wheat Board. It's just the opposite. It's that freedom. It's allowing for that entrepreneurial farmer, who realizes that in the U.K. there's a selenium deficiency and there's a need for high-selenium wheat. So he does his research, and he realizes: "You know what? I live in a region where there is a high selenium content. I've done the extra work on analyzing my wheat, and I meet the criteria of high-selenium wheat." But can he now go over to Great Britain and say, "Here's the product that you're out looking for on the market; I'd like to sell to you"? No.

The biggest problem that we see, Mr. Speaker, when we don't allow that freedom, that entrepreneur, that risk taker – farmers are incredibly high risk takers. When you look at the capital that they actually have invested in their business versus the return on that capital, it truly is a miracle that we have agricultural producers that are willing to stay out there and continue to work the land and enjoy that lifestyle.

We want that entrepreneur to be able to grab and seize a market. Whether that's rolled oats, whether it's the bioenzymes from barley or from some other product, we want them to have that freedom. With the Canadian Wheat Board it's not there.

I am familiar with some of those farmers who have actually gotten together and created a mill, yet the viability is challenged. One of the few that is still functioning is south of Magrath. The viability, though, is challenged every year because of the cost of having to buy their own grain back through the Wheat Board. It serves no purpose other than to prohibit – I shouldn't say prohibit but to make it virtually economically unviable to try to vertically integrate grain products here in western Canada. It was mentioned once, and I need to mention it again, that this is a federal law, yet it's not for the whole country. Do we or do we not live in a country where it's one law, one land? It's just wrong. It's wrong to say

that the federal government is going to what I would refer to as inflict pain on western producers, to say: thou shalt pay for this Wheat Board.

Whenever we create monopolies, it generally always leads to inefficiencies in the market. The monopoly is created. The people that are there say: oh, we have this cost; we have that cost. There's no competition, and the price starts to rise.

It kind of reflects back to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, who talks about Don Baron's *Canada's Great Grain Robbery*. I've always loved that story. Why it's such a great story is because it's true. Any time we can hand something out and say that it's free and have individuals become dependent on that only to find themselves trapped when the gate is shut and they say, "Aha, now you have to pay," there's always a day of reckoning. There's always a day when you have to pay the piper who is giving away that freedom. They give it away. That's the enticement.

It amazes me how well that continues to work today. When we look at all of the marketing of new products, of products that we need to use, whether it's cellphones, new iPads, whatever, they're more than happy to say that the first three months are free. Why? Because they want people to come and try it, and then we say that we can't live without it. They don't give it away for three free months. What they've done is reduced the price by 25 per cent over a year so that you will go into that, so you will buy into their product and try it. It's never free. There's a high cost.

It's argued by many entrepreneurial farmers, who say: there's an extremely high cost when I'm involved with the Wheat Board. The hon. member that has spoken at length about, you know, not renewing his permit book is very frustrated. There are many, many Alberta farmers who have gone that route, saying: you know, I'm not going to renew my quota book because we're going to grow other products. That has not been in the best interests of Alberta, yet the cost efficiencies have been there. To say that if they don't have this monopoly, they'll destroy their ability to market in the world is, again, farmomgering. It's scary.

The most important thing with Bill C-619 and why we need to support the federal government in doing this – it's interesting that it is an MP from Ontario who looks over into western Canada and realizes this is wrong. There's nothing more powerful than speaking out when you see an injustice being committed. When this bullying goes on, it's important that it's that third party who steps up and says, "This is bullying; we can't allow this" and speaks up on behalf of that individual or that region that's receiving those injustices.

Bill C-619 allows the freedom of choice. It allows for the free market to come back into effect in western Canada and allows our wonderful entrepreneurial businessmen to go out around the world and say: "Hey, we've got the best barley. We've got the best wheat." They're going to reach out and develop new markets that the Wheat Board would never consider doing because of the size of that market. It might be a small market of only 100 tonnes of high-selenium wheat that opens the doors to realize a new potential. It might be a vertically integrated pharmaceutical-based company that opens up the door that changes the whole dynamics of the genetic breeding of our canola, our barley, our wheat. I guess with the canola we can already do that.

Again, we saw the breakthrough in the '70s with the breeding of dwarf plants. Now what's the genetic breakthrough that we can have by putting the genetics together for valuable crops, nutritious crops for various areas of the world? Whether it's selenium or whether it's disease-based, there are many, many potentials there, but because of the Wheat Board that entrepreneurial spirit goes down south of the border. It goes to another country to set up.

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to vote in favour of this motion. It's exciting to think that once again, after six decades, western farmers might have the opportunity to have the freedom of choice to grow their wheat where or how or when they want to do it. I'm excited to see, I guess, the overall support here in this House and look forward to sending that message to the federal government to say: yes, we support Bill C-619, and we hope that the federal legislators will pass it for the benefit of western farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

See none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments are more as an actual grain producer. We can talk about philosophies and history all we want, but for many of us who actually produce grain – and I have for some 39 years – it comes down to dollars and cents as much as anything.

You know, in 1972, when I first started to farm, we had a variety of grains that we grew. We had some oilseeds. Over the course of years because of an interest in conservation we've switched to some hay. We have over the years switched to a lot of nonboard grains. I'll call them nonboard. Those are the ones that don't have to be marketed through the Canadian Wheat Board. The reason that our family farm did that – and I consider myself proudly a family farm. I would be one of the first that would bail if I had an option to leave the Wheat Board. I'm not a large farmer. I guess by today's standards we're somewhere between small and medium.

The fact is that when I have to grow grain and I have to market it through a Wheat Board that selects the time of the year that they'll call for so much grain, and then I only get a partial payment on that grain for the balance of the year and at some point in time finally receive what's called a final payment and, if you're really lucky, an interim adjustment in between, you finally get paid for your own inventory at some point way in the future.

5:10

Sometimes I've talked to urban cousins, and I have explained it this way: if I had a men's clothing store in Calgary or Edmonton, and I had somebody telling me that I couldn't sell all the sweaters that I had on the shelf this winter season, that I could only sell a percentage of them, would I be in that business? Would you hold that inventory and not be able to move it through and make all your commitments as a businessperson, pay your taxes and pay your operating expense and your light and your power? I don't think many of them would. If you want to further compound it, would you like to be told that you could sell 60 per cent of your inventory, but you had to sell it at about 70 per cent of what you thought the real value was, and the 70 per cent may or may not cover all the input costs of operating that business. That's a parallel that I see between operating a business in the city and farming.

You know, there were other points that made me decide I wanted an option. I'm not against having the Canadian Wheat Board there. I think they do a wonderful job selling grain internationally. There's no amount of grain that I or my neighbours will produce that could meet a big contract to Algeria when it comes to, say, durum, one of our biggest competitors. I grow durum, Mr. Speaker, which is turned into pasta, and I grow malt barley, which becomes beer, and I grow rye, which becomes drinkable rye, and I grow mustard, which is a condiment mustard that you put on your hot dogs. So I think I kind of understand where a lot of this stuff is coming from.

But what I resent more than anything is the fact that when I sell my grain, I have to sell it, if it's a board grain, through the Canadian Wheat Board through an elevator company, and I pay the freight all the way. I pay it from the time it leaves the farm till it gets to an elevator. The elevator, in turn, gives me an advance payment on behalf of the Canadian Wheat Board. In the meantime, while that grain is being transported out to a terminal, whether it's Vancouver or Thunder Bay, at any point in time there are something like 13 different unions that could hold up the movement of that grain. That puts our reputation as reliable suppliers of foodstuffs at risk, and I still have to pay the freight.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If in the meantime you want to consider how people have not advanced in today's trade technology, only about one-third of all the grain producers are actually trying to market something outside the Canadian Wheat Board.

I always come back to durum. I mentioned this earlier to one of our colleagues. I just sold two super-Bs of grain. That's about 80 tonnes, about 1,770 bushels each. That 1,776 bushels netted me \$6,236, but I paid over \$2,400 on top of that for artificial freight and elevator charges and holding charges for a grain that may not even get out to Vancouver. In all likelihood it's going to go from the elevator to a local flour mill in Lethbridge, Alberta, which, in turn, has to pay freight artificially for the grain to come back through the Canadian Wheat Board from a terminal in Vancouver that may not have seen that grain. So those things alone add up to a lot of cost.

In my world 28 per cent additional cost for something that isn't valid, that isn't provable, that isn't even there is a huge profit margin potential for any farm or, in the case of any of my colleagues in Alberta, an opportunity for them to stay in business whether they're big, whether they're small, or whether they're in between.

I just wanted to put that on the record, Mr. Speaker, because I do support choice. I do support the Canadian Wheat Board to the extent that I think they do a good job marketing internationally. I can't compete with that. But I do want the opportunity to sell my grain to the Alix processing plant, in the case of malt barley, without it being artificially sent somewhere else. I want the opportunity for my durum to end up in a pasta plant somewhere in Alberta without them artificially charging me as though it were to go to Vancouver and then charge that same production plant to haul it back here to turn it into pasta.

I think I've gone on long enough, but that's a point of view from an ordinary grain producer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am aware that this tends to be very much a rural issue, but I did want to speak up on behalf of Calgary-Bow, a very urban constituency, just to express our dismay in terms of our own sense of fairness. It makes no sense to us that there would be Canadian laws that apply differently depending on whether you're an easterner or a westerner. So just basic fairness. It really offends us.

The other thing is that, you know, as urban people most of us don't actually produce that much. Maybe we do some crafts. We have artists. We have writers. Again, it really offends our sense of fairness that someone would work very, very hard to produce something and then not be free to sell it to whomever they chose

to sell it to, whether it's arts, crafts, or whether it's wheat. It just really offends our sense of fairness.

I did want to say that we do wish the Canadian Wheat Board well. We also realize that if the Canadian Wheat Board had proper competition, the Canadian Wheat Board would probably be a much better organization. So we do wish them well. We want them to be the best that they can possibly be.

As a representative of the constituents of Calgary-Bow we wanted to support our rural neighbours in this motion. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions. Comments?

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't speak long on this topic, but it is my privilege to stand up and speak today in favour of Government Motion 11, which urges the members of the Canadian House of Commons to pass Bill C-619, that would provide marketing choice to western Canadian grain farmers. I would also like to thank the minister of agriculture for raising this issue in the House and for providing us the opportunity to support that initiative.

This is certainly an issue that has been talked about for many years. It's been important to Canadian agriculture producers. I think the opportunity to advance the marketing choices for western Canadian grain farmers is significant and important.

As someone who's had a permit book – I've marketed grain, board grains and nonboard grains, for many years – this isn't about criticism of the good work that the Canadian Wheat Board has done for Canadian grain farmers. But we live in a day where agriculture producers are certainly sophisticated in their ability to market the products that they grow. There are multiple examples of the success of that initiative by individual producers, as has been noted by my other colleagues. I think the opportunity to move that forward is important, and we should take advantage of it. I certainly hope that as a result of the support that's lent from this House, that will be advanced at the national level. It is an initiative that the federal government needs to move on, and I hope that we're successful in that.

As someone who has sons involved in the future of agriculture and involved in young farmer initiatives across this province, across this country, I think it's important that we give these young people a range of opportunities to do the best they can in agriculture. It's a challenging business. Certainly, in any market reality it's challenging. But adding costs unnecessarily: we need to avoid that. The opportunity here to advance this cause I think is a positive one.

With that, I would lend my support. I appreciate the comments that other members have made in favour of marketing choice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member – I wasn't sure whether he was there or not, but one of my proud moments as an Albertan was on October 31, 2002, when I was at a Lethbridge rally, where there were 13 farmers who did their patriotic duty to say no to a law that wasn't, I guess, applicable to all Canadians, and they went to jail. There were different members, I believe, in the House that were there at that time. I'm just wondering what his thoughts were on those individuals that have fought this law for a

long time and, if he was there at that rally, how he felt about it back in 2002.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Doerksen: Well, thank you for that question from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. In fact, I wasn't there. I didn't have a permit book at the time. In fact, I believe I was on the board of the Alberta Beef Producers at the time and working on behalf of Alberta cattle producers on a range of issues. But I was certainly aware of that initiative. I guess that's part of the history that I spoke of and that others have spoken of, and it's important that we take opportunities to advance that cause.

I mean, you look at the level of sophistication of agriculture and the importance of that. There have been comments about the family farm, but that doesn't and can't compromise the level of sophistication that agriculture producers need to bring to this business. Whether it's a family farm or an individual or a large company, the importance of these issues is similar. I think that we need to advance the cause of agriculture from that perspective, looking forward, not trying to protect something that was yesterday's approach to business.

I'm not criticizing that in any way, but the importance of looking forward and making sure that we've got the regulatory framework in place to allow and to encourage people to succeed as a result of their own hard work and initiative: those are the things that have been the highlights of the success of Canadian agriculture and Alberta agriculture for many years. I look forward to that continuing as a result of the things that happen in this House as well.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you for that answer. I guess the reason I was wondering about that is because, you know, with the transportation inequities that were there, it had a major impact on the beef industry, I guess, before that was changed, where we were losing our grain to the east and then our cattle going to the east to follow the grain because of that. So that's why I thought that perhaps you'd be involved.

Do you see any downside to the beef industry, then, with the opening up of the freedom of choice for whether or not you participate in the Wheat Board?

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you for that question. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore makes a good point with regard to the fact that inasmuch as single-desk selling keeps feed grain prices low, it was good for cattle producers. I recall during that time frame that some friends of mine, some people I knew well, made the argument also in the Canadian agriculture press that, in fact, the Wheat Board in fact was favourable to the livestock feeding industry in this province, whether it was hogs or beef.

I think the big picture with regard to livestock producers is, in fact, the importance of access to international markets, and inasmuch as single-desk selling was raised as a concern at WTO and those types of discussions, it's a concern for Canadian beef producers. In that light, the opportunity for choice and the opportunity to advance markets and to make it easier to get in and stay in markets is extremely important. The argument that was made was there, but I think the opportunities are in choice.

The Speaker: Additional comments or questions?

Hon. members that exhausts our speaking list unless there's an additional member who would like to participate.

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 2

Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011

[Adjourned debate March 1: Dr. Brown]

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011. Family violence has devastating consequences for many people in our province. Preventing and addressing family violence remains an important priority for our government so that all Albertans feel safe in their communities and homes.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act provides for the safety of individuals and families affected by family violence through protection orders to protect those who have experienced family violence and to prevent further violence. The most significant amendments to the act are to add provisions for prosecuting breaches of these orders. Currently breaches are prosecuted through civil contempt or the Criminal Code, where the penalties available vary considerably. The proposed changes will clearly spell out in the act that breaching a protection order is an offence with specific consequences, helping to ensure consistent enforcement across the province.

If this bill is made law, Alberta's penalties for violations of protection orders will be among the strongest in Canada, which will send a strong message to perpetrators that breaches will not be tolerated. These changes reflect advice and feedback the province has received from key stakeholders, including police and the courts.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, the proposed amendments will improve our response to this issue, increase protection for individuals and families affected by family violence, and hold those who breach protection orders accountable. I ask that all members of the Assembly show strong support for Bill 2 to help ensure that Albertans are better protected from the threat of family violence.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to speak on Bill 2 as presented to the Assembly by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. Certainly, our research on this side of the House indicates that this amendment act has the goal of establishing clear penalties for people who breach the emergency protection orders, with the intent that this will send a clear, strong message that family violence is, once again, totally unacceptable.

This legislation will make it clear what penalties there should be when an emergency protection order is breached by the respondent; in other words, an abusive family member. Prior to this the breach of the emergency protection order was dealt with under civil contempt proceedings or under section 127 of the Criminal Code, which states that it is an offence to breach an order of the court.

These two avenues, Mr. Speaker, do not specifically address family violence, and there was a wide variance in what penalties were used for breaches of emergency protection orders. Certainly,

it is our view that Bill 2 clarifies the evidence which a Court of Queen's Bench justice must consider when reviewing the emergency protection order that was granted by the Provincial Court.

I think this bill as presented is certainly a step in the right direction. The majority of this bill is, one would consider, housekeeping in nature from a legislative drafting process, but there are six areas – I think there are six, Mr. Speaker – or sections dealing with changes to the Protection Against Family Violence Act, and these are all meant to make it in line with other legislation, again, to clarify issues that have arisen since the act was put into force. The main changes are removing the term “designated justice of the peace” and making it simply “justice of the peace” and clarifying what type of contact can be restrained in the emergency protection order and what evidence a justice at the Court of Queen's Bench must take into consideration.

5:30

Now, one amendment of note to this act is the inclusion of offences and penalties for the person who breaks the terms of the emergency protection order. This change, it is our view, will make it clear that family violence is a societal problem and that there need to be clear, defined penalties for those who break the emergency protection orders. I think everyone in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, should consider supporting this bill as this will provide more certainty to the court in what they can consider as evidence and what type of contact is not allowed under an EPO, or emergency protection order, and it will also provide more clarity on what the penalties are for breaking that emergency protection order.

Certainly, I think the members on this side of the House will be supporting this piece of legislation, which deals with the unfortunate circumstances around family violence. I would like to get on the record and thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for his work on this, and I will listen with interest to what other members of the Assembly have to say regarding this bill. I think it is something that we on this side of the House can support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was the third spokesperson. That means that 29(2)(a) kicks in. Any questions?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011. This bill takes great strides to improve protection available for individuals and families affected by family violence. Also, it goes beyond the awareness campaigns which are held every year in November.

The main element of this particular bill is in the introduction of offence provisions and the strong penalties for those who violate protection orders. Mr. Speaker, under the current Protection Against Family Violence Act protection orders can be issued to help protect abused persons and to prevent further violence, but if an abuser violates a protection order, current enforcement options vary, and they are applied inconsistently. The amendments within Bill 2 will add the offences and penalties right into this act, strengthening the legislation to show that breaches of protection orders are serious, with specific consequences.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the proposed penalties reflect what government learned from reviewing domestic violence legislation from across Canada and from consulting with police and the courts right here in our province. The penalties proposed in the amendments include a \$5,000 fine and possible jail time of up to 90 days for the first offence, mandatory jail time of 14 days to 18 months for

a second offence, and of 30 days to approximately 24 months for third and subsequent offences. These penalties will be among the strongest in the country. Imposing mandatory jail time for subsequent offences sends a strong message that breaches of protection orders will not be tolerated and will have severe consequences.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act was first proclaimed in 1999. It was then amended in 2006 to include the following: to add stalking to the definition of family violence, provide a better definition of what constitutes family violence, broaden who is protected under the act, protect vulnerable people, including seniors, and remove barriers that prevented children from getting counselling and treatment. These changes increased the effectiveness of the act and helped to make communities across the province safer and demonstrated that the government is truly committed to ensuring that our legislation continues to evolve to meet the needs of families affected by violence.

Mr. Speaker, a recent report from Statistics Canada said that incidents of criminal harassment or stalking have been gradually rising in Canada over the past 10 years. By adding stalking to our legislation in 2006, we helped to make sure that those who are stalked or harassed can get the protection they need to feel safe in their homes and communities. Through the amendments proposed in Bill 2 we will take another step forward, Mr. Speaker, to help make sure that those who do violate protection orders understand the severity of their actions and that penalties applied reflect the significance of this activity.

Mr. Speaker, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act contains changes that will indeed improve protection for families and strengthen our legislation. I ask that all members of the Assembly strongly support Bill 2.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I have no additional speakers on this. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to participate in the debate?

Ms Pastoor: Yes.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I'd like to mention right off the bat, before I go into some other comments – I'd like to repeat a comment that was made by Jan Reimer of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. This is a woman who, since she has stepped down as the mayor of Edmonton, has devoted all of her energies to looking after and bringing forward the necessity, which is unfortunate, for women's shelters. She said that people who aid victims of domestic violence have long been unhappy about the lack of consequences for abusers who breach emergency protection orders. She also states that she hopes the bill will encourage police to lay criminal charges when people do breach protection orders. One of the other things that I was pleased to see is that it isn't just physical contact that would fall under that. It is also any kind of contact.

Anyone who has worked in this particular area will understand how easy it is for the perpetrator of the abuse to be able to still have a tremendous hold over that person, and of course it's even worse when there are children because they're caught between the mother and the father. Even when parents are really bad parents, the kids still only have those two people as parents, so they're torn, and they're upset. Then they've got the father that will come and make all sorts of promises. It's a vicious, vicious circle that goes around. Very, very unfortunate. I'm sorry that we don't have even more women's shelters because the need out there is so

great. I believe that Alberta has the third-highest rate of family violence in Canada, which is certainly nothing to be proud of.

The Protection Against Family Violence Act has been in force since 1999, but in 2006 it was amended so that additional protections were granted to victims of family violence such as improved protection against stalking and protection of relatives regardless of whether they're living with the victim, and it clarified when an emergency protection order can be granted.

Most of the amendments that are coming forward with the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act are of a housekeeping nature except for the new provisions to include a specific offences and penalties section for breaches of an emergency protection order. They're not easy to get, the emergency protection orders. There is a process that sometimes takes time. I'm glad that we can now have not a designated – what's the word? – justice of the peace but, rather, just one that can be used.

Often people will show up after midnight at women's shelters. It doesn't happen in the afternoon, when it's really easy to get hold of people within the justice system. The women that come need time. It's not just a 24-hour process. They need time. Some even need as much as three weeks just to be able to figure out what's going on. They're frightened. They're scared, their kids are upset, and it takes a long time and well-trained people to work with them to be able to get them on their feet so that they can say: "No. I won't put up with this again. There are other things that I can do to make it good for my children and myself. We don't have to go back to this." Although many still do, which is very, very unfortunate.

5:40

The emergency protection order is a tool that can be used to immediately address the safety of victims of family violence. It can provide that the abuser has no contact or communication with the victim and that the victim can stay at the residence while the abuser is not able to and other conditions that can provide for the immediate safety of the victim and the family members. When the women and their children go back to the house, unless these women can feel absolutely safe, they're always looking over their shoulder, they're always nervous, they don't sleep, and they're very mixed up.

Again, that circle of abuse can continue even if it isn't being done by the perpetrator of the abuse. It happens in the women's minds because they don't have that security. If they know that some have actually been prosecuted for breaking this emergency protection order, hopefully it will give them a little bit of security so that they can then try to go forward and not always have to be looking over their shoulders.

An emergency protection order can be obtained at no cost. Children and Youth Services caseworkers and the police can apply for it within 24 hours, seven days a week. Victims can also apply at the Provincial Court during court hours. If the EPO is obtained, it's always scheduled to be reviewed within nine working days, and this allows for the emergency protection order to be extended or to be changed to a Queen's Bench protection order. The Queen's Bench protection order can only be applied for by the victim and not by the caseworkers or police. I'm glad that it takes that long because most times the women involved are often very, very hesitant about bringing forth charges because they're still frightened.

The Edmonton Police Service has stated that they investigated 6,700 cases of spousal abuse in 2010, and in 2008 they investigated 4,000 cases. Clearly, this trend is going up. I'm not sure why, but I know that there are people doing research to answer that question. Often in boom times it happens, but it also happens

in the bust times, when people are under such pressure. I'm hoping that the research would come forward and we could get some kind of an answer so that we could prevent some of this ahead of time or, in fact, allow some women to know what the signs are before they'd even marry people. Often the signs are there, but because love is blind and often very blind, they marry people that are just not suitable for them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. I think this is a very, very important bill. Hopefully, those numbers that I just spoke about in terms of spousal abuse will be able to be decreased all through this province, not just in Edmonton.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

To the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, there was a quotation from a document. Would you kindly table the document tomorrow in the House so all members can have it?

Ms Pastoor: Yes.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 3 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2011

[Adjourned debate March 10: Ms Notley]

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

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to indicate my support for Bill 3 and the role that it will play in advancing the geological and geophysical professions in this province. The present act, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, regulates three related professional groups: professional engineers, professional geologists, and professional geophysicists. With changing technology and the growth of the oil and gas industry in Alberta these latter two professions are sharing more and more common ground – pardon the pun – these days, so bringing them together under a single, broader nomenclature makes abundant sense.

Alberta is also unique in Canada in that 90 per cent of the geophysicists in Canada practise in Alberta. None of the other provinces have separate designations for geologists and geophysicists. Aligning designations nationally will facilitate professional administration under the agreement on internal trade as well as within the professional associations.

On concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona about TILMA, I think it is fair to say that most professional associations had some initial concerns about TILMA and the potential for having a difficult time exercising their professional responsibilities across provincial borders. As I understand it, these concerns have all been worked out, and I believe all of the Alberta professional associations are quite comfortable with the arrangements under TILMA.

If passed, this amendment act will combine the existing professional geologist and professional geophysicist classifications in Alberta into a single new class to be known as professional geoscientists. These professional designations are granted by the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, or APEGGA, which approved these proposed changes in 2009. As my colleague the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has indicated, these proposed changes are important to Albertans since we will all continue to benefit from the acceptance of professional responsibility for work done in these areas by qualified geoscientists.

Having a licensed, accountable professional in the position of approving work is the key to providing public safety in any field, whether it's engineering, land surveying, medicine, law, or, in this case, geoscience. That is the basis of professionalism, and it is the reason why the province grants regulatory organizations such as APEGGA the right to regulate those who work in the profession. As a government it is our responsibility to ensure that the safety and protection of the public is maintained. We continue to do that through the regulations of the professionals we entrust to protect the safety and well-being of the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the professional associations bear a huge governmental responsibility, relieving government of the cost and burden of maintaining competent professionals to deliver these highly technical and specialized services to Albertans. In exchange, however, for granting professional associations an exclusive field of practice and protection of title, those associations have a responsibility to ensure that their memberships are, firstly, qualified academically as well as experientially to engage in the practice of the profession but, more importantly, to ensure that those members, once admitted to practise, maintain their competency and keep up to date with changing technology and knowledge. This challenge, I would submit, requires not just vigilance on the part of the professional association but, more importantly, in the ethical pursuit of the specialty by the practitioner.

Just to capsulize the responsibility of the self-governing profession, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to offer this quote from Everett Hughes. "In place of the cautionary admonition of the market place – caveat emptor (let the buyer beware!) professional practice should substitute the encouraging injunction – credat emptor, (let the buyer trust!)"

Mr. Speaker, by passing this bill, we are also living up to commitments that have been made by the province regarding the interprovincial mobility of labour. Professional geoscientists are needed here. Our economy relies on their expertise and the innovative techniques that they use to explore, locate, and develop valuable natural resources. This proposed act builds on the expertise by creating an up-to-date and comprehensive scope of practice for Alberta's geoscience profession. It also allows the interprovincial mobility of geoscientists from other provinces to fill Alberta's demand for skilled professionals in this field.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Bill 3, in light of what has happened across the globe in Japan, is to say the least an interesting draft of legislation for us when you consider that the definition of geoscience includes all the sciences – geology, geophysics, geochemistry – that study the structure, evolution, and dynamics of Planet Earth and its natural mineral and energy resources. Geoscience investigates the processes that shaped the Earth through its 4,600 million year history and uses the rock record to unravel that history. It is concerned with the real world beyond the lab and has direct relevance to the needs of our society.

Now, modern geoscience is founded on plate tectonics theory, which states that the outer part of the Earth, the lithosphere, is composed of a series of interlocking plates in relative motion. All geological processes such as mountain building and earthquake and volcanic activity are directly or indirectly related to the motions of the plates.

Geoscience. Across Canada there appears to be widespread acceptance of the umbrella terminology "geoscience," and other hon. members in debate so far have certainly covered that with Bill 3 and the changes to rename the act the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act and rename the association which administers these professions to the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta. It would be APEGA, with one G, as I understand it.

Certainly, with what's going on in Japan, I'm certain that the members of this organization or body would probably be going there to study not only the effects of the earthquake but also the tsunami that followed quickly afterwards. I'm confident in saying that some of our engineers will probably be watching closely three of the four nuclear reactors that are located very close to tidewater and how they have been affected by these unfortunate events. In our part of the world we may forget sometimes the importance of sound engineering and how important it is that we follow not only sound engineering practices but that we ensure that our engineering professions are protected. By that, I mean the integrity of the academic programs. There are many people who want to shift a lot of our engineering offshore, and I'm not convinced the standards are the same in some of those locations as they are here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to caution all hon. members of this Assembly that through our education system we train some very, very able people under the professions that we have earlier discussed with Bill 3, and I think that that should and hopefully will continue.

Now, this certainly is a lengthy bill. Bill 3, I think, if I am correct, is just changing the various geological fields, as we said, and grouping them under the single name, the one name "geoscience." Hopefully, this will work out for everyone concerned, and I would like it to formally be on the record that I appreciate the efforts of the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon on this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I have no additional speakers. Shall I call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate?

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening intently to the comments made by my colleagues. As I alluded to in my previous comments, this is just a straightforward process of harmonizing our professional geoscience legislation with that of other jurisdictions and, in so doing, fostering labour mobility across our country.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to further discussion in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 4 Securities Amendment Act, 2011

[Adjourned debate March 1: Dr. Brown]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've just got to find my notes here. Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011, also proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, is certainly an interesting bill. I have a lot of questions about this bill, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak at this time.

These amendments harmonize the passport system that originated six years ago in a memorandum of understanding between the federal and provincial governments. I don't think Ontario was

included in that. The amendments here also support Canada's conversion to the international financial reporting standards. We are looking at creating a framework for regulating credit-rating organizations with this legislation. Bill 4 will also allow the Alberta Securities Commission to impose sanctions for late filing of disclosure. That is more similar to the British Columbia model. I believe there are also further amendments to ensure that Alberta's registration regime is harmonized with the other provinces.

Now, there certainly has been some interest in this bill. I had an individual phone me yesterday regarding this legislation. I had to inform this individual that I was sorry, that I had not had an opportunity to look at this bill in as much detail as I would have liked. I know this legislation has been discussed around the drafting table by the government. Probably the lawyers and Alberta Justice were diligent since last fall in preparing this legislative proposal for the House. But I had to inform this individual that I had not had a chance to have a look at it yet, that that's not the usual practice of this government. He was astonished to learn that, and he thought that was unfair, Mr. Speaker. He thought that all members of the House would be updated as this bill worked its way through the drafting process. He also was of the opinion that:

oh, well; it'll go to a committee, and the committee can have a look at it. I told him, with all due respect, that that, too, was wishful thinking.

This legislation certainly will allow for the harmonization or the mutual recognition of securities regulators in Canada throughout the passport system. Now, amendments have been made to securities legislation each and every year, that I'm aware of, since 2004. This happens across the country to bring the language of the legislation into a common baseline. There's a lot of back and forth, as they say, between the provinces . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, excuse me. You will be recognized again when this matter returns, but the Assembly now stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

I would advise all members that the policy field committee will reconvene in 30 minutes from now in this Assembly, at 6:30 p.m., for consideration of the main estimates of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and that meeting will be video streamed.

So we will meet again tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

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

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