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The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 17, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 25 grade 6 students from Neerlandia public Christian school within your constituency. They're accompanied this afternoon by their teacher, Mr. Jim Bosma; assistant Brenda Gelderman; parent helpers Raine Kooger, Rudy Sybesma, Denise Stoik, Albert Slomp, and Arjan Koekkoek. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I've got another group I'd like to introduce to you and through you, some students from my constituency. They're from Thorhild central school. It was a pleasure to meet them this afternoon and have a picture taken on the steps. We've got 19 grade 6 students with us from the Thorhild central school and their teacher, Mike Popowicz, teacher's assistant Sharon Lakusta, and parent Monique Hoffman. Monique's husband, Nick, was in earlier in the week. It was a pleasure to have him in here as well. They're seated in the public gallery as well, and I'd like to ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 17 amazing students from Morrin elementary school, towards the south end of my constituency. These are quite possibly some of the brightest and best-looking students in the province of Alberta. I had a chance to have my picture taken with them on the steps today, and it was wonderful. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Saltys, and also by 13 parents and aides, that I will not use the whole afternoon introducing. I invite all of my colleagues to join me in welcoming these wonderful students and their parents and teachers and aides.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend and constituent from Lethbridge. He's a businessman and a community volunteer. I'd like to just thank Mr. Mark Switzer for coming up to visit. I would ask that he receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great pleasure of hosting an individual I've known for many, many years. I call her an old friend, but actually she's a friend of old. She's been involved for years in seeking equality for aboriginal people. She's president of the youth justice committee and has worked 23 years at the Solicitor General Staff College teaching aboriginal awareness to all Justice employees. Of course, we had a really great lunch. She's standing already. Her name is Lenda Fisher. I'd ask this Assembly to please give her a warm welcome.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I represent the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. In Edmonton-Centre there is a wonderful postsecondary institution called Grant MacEwan University, and inside of that is Minerva Senior Studies. We have joining us today in the public gallery 11 seniors who are members of that wonderful institution. They are always a vigorous group, and I so enjoy our spring teas. With them today is their group leader, Ms Jo Whitford. I would ask the members of the Minerva Senior Studies to please rise and accept the warm welcome the Assembly. There they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Mimi Hui, executive director of the University of Alberta language learning program, and Tammy Ma, the program assistant, along with 20 government officials and civil servants from Vietnam. The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and myself met with this group early this afternoon. Their group leader is Mr. Hào, deputy director of the Department of Information and Communication. Other guests include the director of the Red Cross, the director of the Agriculture Promotion Centre, the dean of the School of Politics, and public officials from various government departments and regions of Vietnam. They are here on a government of Vietnam program to learn about Canadian culture and language. Now I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome from our Assembly.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members a special guest who joins us in the public gallery. Lori Sigurdson is the professional affairs co-ordinator for the Alberta College of Social Workers and is here today to be recognized in honour of National Social Work Month. Social workers find it extremely challenging to support families facing issues of poverty beyond their control. While many other provinces have implemented comprehensive poverty reduction strategies, Alberta remains without. I will rise again to make a statement on the college's joint initiative for a poverty reduction strategy for Alberta, but in the meantime would the members of this House please give Lori a cordial greeting.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a young man. His name is Andrew Lineker. At the age of 13 he worked on Laurence Decore's campaign, and after that he worked on Grant Mitchell's campaign. Most recently he ran in the mayoral election, and I believe he finished fourth in Edmonton. When we bring these young people to the Legislature, they indeed one day will run for public service and, hopefully, one day will replace

us all. I'd like to thank Andrew for his commitment to public service and serving Alberta and serving Edmonton. I'd like him to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a guest today from out of province, actually. He's from Victoria, B.C., and I'd like to introduce him to you and to all members of the Assembly. His name is Ryan Pineo. He's a legislative assistant to the government caucus in British Columbia, and he is spending some time here in Edmonton, watching how the Legislature of Alberta works in comparison to B.C.'s. I see he is standing in the public gallery. I'd ask everyone here to please give him a warm welcome.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Election Anniversaries

The Speaker: Hon. members, this weekend March 20 will mark the 22nd anniversary of the first election of two members of this Assembly. Congratulations to the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and congratulations to the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Members' Statements

St. Patrick's Day

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, this morning was the 26th annual St. Patrick's Day parade in my hometown of Carmangay, which has gained notoriety as being perhaps the shortest parade in the world. Residents and visitors at the post office gather for a one-block trek to the Grange Hotel for complimentary beer and/or Irish coffee.

Today is a celebration for those of us of Irish descent and those who want to be for the day. My siblings and I are especially proud to be the fifth-generation descendants of great-great-grandparents who came to York, Ontario, from county Tyrone in Northern Ireland in 1850, before this was even a country. In 1898 my great-grandparents arrived in southern Alberta prior to us establishing ourselves as a province in 1905. Our family is very proud of the history that we have, and I want to salute my brother Todd for the passionate work he's done in putting together the family history that we can study in our homes.

1:40

You know, the history of all these people that came not just from Ireland but from all the other countries exemplifies the work and tenacity that they had in creating our province. They truly are the pioneers, those that came in those early years, not today's seniors; I'm sorry.

I salute all my forebears for their tenacity, their pride, and their love, especially our Aunt Barb, the last of our family's fourth generation, who passed away this past year. The memento on your desk is a symbol of what she would have shared with you had you had the opportunity to visit her in her home in St. Albert. I guarantee it would have been a larger, fuller version. Her words would be: may the best day of your past be the worst day of your future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Child Poverty

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Social workers are among

the most altruistic and caring citizens in Alberta. Each one makes a deliberate choice to dedicate their life to helping the less fortunate. Today the Alberta College of Social Workers is calling on this government to take real steps to reduce one of the most important problems of our time, child poverty.

According to the latest data approximately 53,000 children live in poverty, half of them living in single-parent Alberta families. Keep in mind that this data doesn't take the recession into account, so the current numbers must be even higher. I've heard it's closer to 80,000 these days.

There are a number of positive steps a truly progressive government could take to alleviate child poverty. For example, they could support the Alberta Liberal plan to provide hot lunch at school for at-risk kids. Hungry children have a hard time focusing on their schoolwork. This step would help address that problem by giving poor kids some of the help they need to succeed at school and, therefore, stand a better chance of escaping the cycle of poverty.

This government should also look at the minimum wage. Our current minimum wage of \$8.80 an hour is the second lowest in the nation, and it has been deliberately frozen by Canada's wealthiest provincial government. Over 60 per cent of minimum wage earners are women, many of them supporting children in poverty, yet this government won't even raise Alberta's minimum wage a measly 25 cents as recommended by the Committee on the Economy. Another 25 cents an hour doesn't sound like much to anyone sitting in this Assembly, but to the working poor it can mean the difference between feeding their family or being forced to skip a few meals.

The list of proactive steps that could be taken goes on. Alberta needs far more affordable housing. Alberta's high school completion rate and the rate of students moving on to postsecondary education must both be drastically improved.

Mr. Speaker, all three territories and 6 out of 10 provinces have action plans to reduce poverty. Alberta is lagging behind, and as a result Albertans are falling behind as well. Let's follow the advice of the College of Social Workers and join our fellow Canadians in ending the cycle of poverty.

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

Monterey Park Telecommunications Tower

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Constituents in my area have raised concerns over plans to build a telecommunications tower in Monterey Park. The structure itself will consist of a 25-metre-long stealth monopole tower. It appears the proposal may sit just metres from the homes of several of my constituents living on Del Monica Place. Specifically, this tower could be just metres from the homes of the Duong and Yanke families. This is the second time these families have had to deal with a provider trying to put up a cellphone tower directly over their shared fence.

I'm told that this site may be one of 300 to 400 which may be built in the city of Calgary. This has the potential to cause many families undue distress and force them to mobilize their communities.

Mr. Speaker, because telecommunications companies are federally incorporated entities, it appears federal legislation or regulations set out the rules that essentially must be followed. Therefore, I think that it's due time that the CRTC and the federal government provide guidelines, number one, that put in place mechanisms that deal with applications that are submitted to address the same location so that families don't have to through the same process twice.

Number two, I have been informed that the CRTC has no regulations to determine the physical distance between a wireless tower and a residence. This, too, Mr. Speaker, I think is a void on the part of the CRTC.

As proposed, I do not support the construction of this tower, and I simply take the side of my constituents, who deserve a voice around the federal table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

State of the Health Care System

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Day after day we hear from some quarters of the House that Alberta's health care system is somehow in crisis. What is seldom heard is that Alberta has a first-class health care system. My constituents tell me that they have health care when they need it. Let me share some examples of excellence in our system and how it continues to get better.

From 2004 to 2008 Alberta had the highest percentage increase of physicians in all Canadian provinces, a 22.5 per cent increase. Despite an aging demographic our stroke strategy has led to a 23 per cent decline in the numbers of stroke patients presenting in emergency departments and admitted to hospital. Emergency patients who come in to our emergency departments and have been seen, assessed, and are waiting for a bed dropped by 68 per cent in Calgary and 42 per cent in the Edmonton area since September alone.

In our five-year health action plan we have the most progressive approach to renewing and strengthening the publicly funded health care system ever put in place by any provincial government in Canada. Alberta is a Canadian leader in the advancement of medical research and technology, and we're on track to have the best performing publicly funded health care system in Canada.

I want to thank the 117,000 health care workers, 7,400 physicians, hospital staff, nurses, therapists, orderlies, and those who clean the hospital rooms, all of whom perform countless thousands of tasks every day, not to mention the 15,000 volunteers who assist in our health facilities. They don't get the recognition they should have for making Alberta's universal, publicly funded health care system among the very best in the world.

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

National Cord Blood Bank

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a new national program that will help thousands of Canadians and Albertans who require medical treatments that can involve the use of stem cells. On Monday, March 14, Canadian Blood Services and the Provincial and Territorial Blood Liaison Committee announced the national cord blood banking program. This national program will manage the collection and distribution of donated umbilical cord blood across Canada.

While Canada does have three cord blood banks, including the public Cord Blood Bank here in Alberta, there is no system in place, Mr. Speaker, that links them together. This program will make sure that any patient in Canada will have access to cord blood therapy no matter where they live.

Umbilical cord blood is an important source for stem cells, which are used in transplant procedures, gene therapy, and to combat diseases such as leukemia and sickle cell disease. Cord blood stem cells are often a better option over bone marrow stem cells because they are less likely to be rejected by the patient.

Currently more than 800 patients need a blood stem cell transplant to help combat disease. Canada has access to more than 15 million potential stem cell donors and more than 460,000 cord blood units world-wide, but the needs of Canadian patients and Alberta patients are not all being met. That's why this national program is so important.

In 1996 Dr. John Akabutu founded the Alberta Cord Blood Bank, which is the only public cord blood bank in Alberta. It is located in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker. It shows that we are a pioneer and a strong leader in this area.

With the launch of this national program we have a unique opportunity to share our experience and our expertise in cord blood therapy to provide a valuable resource to the rest of the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment and Immigration had been dragging his feet on the minimum wage. He has had a report from the Standing Committee on the Economy since last October and taken no action. The report of the committee, that has been under study by the minister for five months, has seven simple recommendations and is only two pages in length.

With plans for an increase in B.C. Alberta is again about to become the province with the lowest minimum wage in the nation. This is absolutely disgraceful. But this government is guilty of more than just foot-dragging on this issue. There was a process in place to make regular adjustments to minimum wage to keep up with the cost of living. They've cancelled that, Mr. Speaker, so low-wage workers are falling further and further behind. This is in the face of increases, particularly in the area of food.

The proposed increase in minimum wage, which the minister feels so little urgency about, would mean \$2 more a day for a full-time worker. This government won't take action on that, but they can find \$1.4 billion in drilling incentives for big oil companies.

1:50

Trying to have a decent life on a low income creates tremendous stress. It affects health. It affects safety. It affects the success of children. It creates huge and unnecessary additional social costs of all sorts. A society that leaves some of its people behind will pay a larger price for that along the way and for a very long time.

Most provinces in this country not only have significantly higher minimum wage levels; they have moved on to focus on eliminating poverty with comprehensive plans that include attention to the idea of a living wage. Mr. Speaker, the committee's report recommends that Alberta get to work on this as well.

Failure to act immediately on a minimum wage increase and to start working on poverty reduction is to abandon Albertans to a life of unnecessary struggle. It's time this minister acted and made a clear commitment to a livable minimum wage.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Clerk calls question period, just a few comments of guidance with respect to the upcoming Oral Question Period. Yesterday afternoon we had a rather lengthy discussion in this House about decorum, about

manners, about the rules associated with question period. I had tabled on all members' desks some documents out of *Beauchesne* dealing with, I believe, sections 403 to 420. In addition to that, certain guides were read into the *Hansard*, and emphasis was placed on such things as preambles – preambles on the first question, not on the two following ones – brevity, clarity, and no provocation. Those were the wishes. The chair indicated as well that he would be intervening. The chair does not want to intervene but will if required.

Oral Question Period

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

Patient Advocacy by Physicians

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association supports the opposition call for a public inquiry into allegations of government intimidation of physicians who raise concerns over health care delivery. In a letter AMA president Patrick White wrote:

There are concerns that, when speaking out, physicians may not feel they will be heard or may fear negative consequences . . . One proposal being put forward is that government should call a full public inquiry regarding the issue of intimidation . . . The AMA will support and cooperate with such an approach if [it] occurs.

To the Premier: with the AMA now supporting the opposition, will the Premier call an independent, judge-led public inquiry and restore . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member forgot to read the rest of the letter, where it says:

While I am not an expert in the various approaches that may be taken, an open and full review is needed to clear the air and move forward. The AMA will support and cooperate with such an approach if this occurs.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier finally concede that only a public inquiry will allow doctors to come forward without threats of intimidation, and only an inquiry can subpoena witnesses, including your own ministers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the AMA supports a review to clear the air, and just hot off the press: the Health Quality Council issued their terms of reference. They went to the media, they went to all Albertans, and we've just received them. One of the terms of reference, of course, is to hear physicians advocate on behalf of their patients to the Health Quality Council.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the refusal of the Premier to call a public inquiry clearly shows he's afraid of what they might find. What is it you're afraid of, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Health Quality Council just informed all Albertans of the terms of reference. They are very clear, and one of the terms, of course, is to review "the role and ability of physicians to advocate for patients" and whether it is compromised. That, to me, is very clear.

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

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, where there's smoke, there's fire. There's an alarming trend of doctors coming forward and being called mentally unstable by this government for speaking out for their patients. The list continues to grow: Dr. McNamee, Dr. Maybaum, Dr. Fanning, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and recently Dr. Nunes. Incredibly, in the case of Dr. Nunes he fought back for five years, and a court finally ruled the allegations of mental instability were unsupported. His privileges were reinstated. How many doctors and health care professionals, Premier, like Dr. McNamee and Dr. Nunes will have to come forward, risking their reputations before . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government, to my knowledge, has not, against the names that have been listed there, issued any opinion on the mental state of any of the physicians. The competency of physicians, the licence to practice is done through the College of Physicians and Surgeons and is not the responsibility of the minister nor of the Premier.

Dr. Swann: To the Premier: is what happened to Dr. Nunes' reputation what this Premier had in mind when he advised all health professionals with concerns of wrongdoing to directly report to Alberta Health Services? Is that what you had in mind?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the doctor that the member is referring to: I have no knowledge of his concerns raised to Alberta Health Services, and the other is that, again, it's not my responsibility or the minister of health's to deal with situations that may come up, differences of opinion between physicians, their employer, which is Alberta Health Services, their college, or the AMA.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the list of damning allegations grows daily. Will the Premier finally answer the question: will you call a public inquiry and put this issue to bed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, I've answered this question many times. I've asked the minister to have the Health Quality Council conduct a full review. We've now just recently received all of the terms of reference that the Health Quality Council will be operating under. They are extremely broad and give the Health Quality Council a lot of latitude to hear all of the evidence that is necessary to conduct a good review.

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

Settlement Agreement with Dr. Ciaran McNamee

Mr. MacDonald: The Government Organization Act clearly outlines the authority and the responsibility for each and every ministry. The Premier is the final authority as the President of Executive Council. My first question is to the Premier. Given that this government reported in 2009 in its books a \$1.6 million severance payment to the former chief executive officer of the Calgary health region, Jack Davis, why was this settlement deal made public while the settlement deal with Dr. Ciaran McNamee is hidden somewhere in this government's books?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary regional health board was appointed by government, the CEO, and it's the same legislation that applies to other CEOs that work for boards that are under the auspices of the government, including, I believe, even superin-

tendents of various organizations that report to government. Those salaries are made public according to our legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that this government reported in 2009 in its books the \$1.5 million severance payment made to the CEO of the Capital health authority, Sheila Weatherill, why again is the settlement deal with Dr. Ciaran McNamee hidden somewhere in this government's books?

Mr. Stelmach: The same answer I gave to the first question although a different doctor. Again, we have a responsibility according to the legislation that we have passed in this Legislature. Those that are CEOs of those operations that report directly to government: those salaries are then made public and also any of the contractual obligations that we might have entered into.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Given that his government promised that they would be open and transparent, another example, this time in 2009. Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, CEO of the Alberta Cancer Board, received a severance payment of \$1.8 million. Why is this settlement deal public while the deal with Dr. Ciaran McNamee is hidden somewhere in the books of this government? Explain that, please.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the doctor he was referring to was reporting to the CEO of the cancer board, which reported directly to the minister of health. Once again, we are following the legislation that was passed in the House.

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

Patient Advocacy by Physicians (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the Premier accused opposition parties of playing political football by asking for a public inquiry into the government's intimidation of physicians and public health care professionals. Today the AMA president released a letter saying, "AMA supports a public inquiry." To the Premier: is the president of the AMA playing political football by supporting a public inquiry?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again a shorter quote according to this member than the previous member. Let me again read it into the record, and I have the copies here to table at the conclusion. It says:

One proposal being put forward is that government should call a full public inquiry regarding the issue of intimidation. While I am not an expert in the various approaches that may be taken, an open and full review is needed to clear the air and move forward. The AMA will support and cooperate with such an approach if this occurs.

Funny how they always miss the last three words.

Mr. Hinman: The AMA supports a public inquiry. To the Premier: given that the AMA president in today's St. Patrick's Day letter says that a public inquiry is needed to clear the air and move forward regarding the issue of physician intimidation, will you now call a full, independent public inquiry with the full power to subpoena witnesses and compel evidence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again it's very clear. In the terms of reference that were released just a few minutes ago by the

Health Quality Council, they're telling all Albertans that they are going to ensure the role and ability of physicians to advocate for their patients, whether that was compromised. They'll be able to hear all the evidence and anybody that wants to come forward and appear before the council.

Mr. Hinman: The pressure will keep building.

Again to the Premier: given that in order to run a health care system you actually need doctors willing to perform surgeries and treat patients here in Alberta and given that those doctors are today calling for a public inquiry to clear the air and move forward, will you support our doctors or continue to protect your political hide at the expense of Alberta's health?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, comments coming from a party that just sent 30 physicians to Vietnam.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Bruce Power

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Minister of Energy has steadfastly refused to answer questions about nuclear power in Alberta and the government's covert support for Bruce Power and its plans to build a nuclear reactor in Alberta. Given the emerging catastrophe in Japan, Albertans deserve clear answers about this government's involvement with Bruce Power and its plans to build a nuclear reactor in our province. Will the minister come clean with Albertans and tell them exactly what's going on behind closed doors between this government and Bruce Power?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to disappoint the hon. member, but I've seen no application from Bruce Power to construct a nuclear plant in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that former PC campaign manager Randy Dawson was a paid lobbyist for Bruce Power and given that this government has been involved in dozens of meetings behind closed doors with Bruce Power and its paid lobbyist, will the minister commit to putting on the record every single piece of correspondence, meeting, and topic discussed between this government, its agencies, and nuclear industry lobbyists? Yes or no.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've never met with Bruce Power. I do not know anyone that works for Bruce Power. If the member is asking for this government to put on record such documents, I would suggest there's an appropriate place on the Order Paper to ask for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that Bruce Power donated \$17,000 to the PC Party between 2008 and '09 alone, \$990 of which was to the constituency association of the MLA for Dunvegan-Central Peace, and given that Trans-Canada Pipelines, one of the companies that owns Bruce Power, donated \$119,000 to the PCs between 2004 and 2009, will the minister admit that this Tory government is working hand in glove with Bruce Power to bring incredibly dangerous nuclear power plants to Alberta and is deliberately hiding that fact from the people of this province?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Health Quality Council Review

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, just hours before the McNamee allegations surfaced, the Premier inexplicably reversed course to support a Health Quality Council review. Yesterday the damning allegations from Dr. Nunes surfaced, and within an hour there's an open letter to physicians from Alberta Health Services extolling the virtues of doctors bringing concerns forward in an open Alberta Health Services environment. Now with the AMA statement the Health Quality Council of Alberta released its concerns and its terms of reference. To the minister: was the minister's office aware that the McNamee lawsuit would be released by the media before you made your decision and the government made its decision to support the health quality review?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker, I was not personally aware. However, what I think is important to note is that a lot of what this hon. member is talking about falls into that category: that was then; this is now. I'll tell you what we have now. We have a three-way letter signed by the Health Services, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the Alberta Medical Association that clearly states what patient advocacy is all about. We also have Alberta Health Services medical staff bylaws, which clearly say that it's their duty and their responsibility. Today we have the Health Quality Council terms of reference that's going to be looking into this further.

The Speaker: The hon. leader, please.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Was the minister of health aware that Dr. Chris Eagle would distribute the open letter to physicians as a response to Dr. Nunes' allegations outlining a culture of fear and intimidation?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I am aware of is that three very respected doctors, specifically Dr. Chris Eagle, Dr. David Megran, and Dr. Francois Belanger, issued a letter I believe it was yesterday. It was an open letter to physicians, that went out to about 90,000 people in the system, telling them essentially what I just said in the last series of answers, and that was that there is a duty here for . . .

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think most people know that sunshine is the best disinfectant. I'm sure this minister knows that. Will you push forward for a public inquiry and clear the air on intimidation and threats and potential financial misconduct?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, clearly, he's not yet aware – perhaps I should make him aware – of the fact that the Health Quality Council just probably an hour or so ago released their terms of reference. That looks to me like the first step in a process for an independent review that's going to look into quality of care and safety of patients and the role and process of physician advocacy, and very soon they will appoint a blue-ribbon panel to effectuate this.

The Speaker: There may be some tablings required here. Be ready to do them later.

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

Spring Flooding in Southern Alberta

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our agriculture industry through no fault of its own is once again experiencing some challenges with excess moisture in southern Alberta. Producers and residents are already seeing some localized flooding as a result of the snowmelt. In fact, there's one area so far that is under flood alert. I'm also receiving calls from other areas of my large constituency. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Are the pumps you mentioned last week still available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they are, and there are, in fact, some more pumps being moved into position in southern Alberta. These pumps are available for producers at no cost, as they were last year. We also have them available for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and Alberta Environment, and they are spread among the communities now to try and respond quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on that, to the same minister: given that you mentioned that these pumps have been strategically placed and they could easily divert a large amount of water, what's the process for accessing these pumps?

Mr. Hayden: Well, application requests for the pumps actually go through ARD's water-pumping program. We've already alerted our drivers and our delivery people to be able to respond on a moment's notice because we know that the situation is very serious. It's important to note that a number of risk management and crop insurance programs are also available through FSC to help address some of these flooding problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the mitigation efforts that you mentioned last week such as the Candam material and others be made available right now for our residents who require them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we've assisted the municipalities in their role by providing flood mitigation equipment. Eighty-three thousand sandbags are on location now. There's an additional 80,000 bags that were ordered today through Service Alberta, and 30 metres of Candam is on location. I've confirmed this morning with municipalities that this government will be providing \$1 million in grant funding to support those and other short-term mitigation efforts. Municipalities are responsible for determining the best way to use and allocate those resources based on their local priorities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Heartland Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's heartland 500-kilovolt transmission project will have significant impacts on the people living in the county of Strathcona and the city of Ed-

monton. This high-voltage power line is scheduled to be built in close proximity to homes, schools, daycares, hospitals, and environmentally sensitive areas. To the Minister of Energy: does the minister deny that there are health impacts to residents in close proximity to the above-ground high-voltage power lines that are going to be built?

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if it's an opinion, it doesn't count. Government policy.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to put some facts on the record because this member has just made some allegations or comments that I think need to be refuted.

First of all, there is a hearing by the Alberta Utilities Commission that will commence next month. All of the facts will be laid before the commission, including anyone who wants to lay supposed health facts before the commission. All I can say is that Health Canada monitors these situations. There are no known risks according to Health Canada with electric currents in any form.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that answer. I guess the follow-up is: are these citizens wrong to insist that these high-voltage power lines that will be going up in their neighbourhood should be buried underground?

Mr. Liepert: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying anybody is right or wrong. All I'm saying is that we are doing what we should be doing: having a full, open, independent hearing on these power lines. In addition to that, we are using statistical data that Health Canada has on its website, if the member would like to take a look. We're trusting those who are experts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank you. So just confirming here, this government is open to other options besides running these high-powered lines above ground in Strathcona. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this member was in the Legislature when we approved Bill 50 with four critical transmission lines; one of them is the heartland transmission line. Within that, however, the process is that the Alberta Utilities Commission will determine such things as siting, cost allocation, and that's what will be the subject of the hearing next month.

Postsecondary Education for Rural Students

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, while Alberta has a number of excellent rural colleges, there are other communities who would like an institution of their own. It is believed that this would make post-secondary education accessible to more Albertans and reduce expenses for students who need to commute or relocate. My questions today are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The ministry's goal is to increase options and opportunities for Alberta students. Are we not considering more rural colleges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're always looking for opportunities to deliver new programming and new courses across the province. In fact, as we speak, Northern Lakes College is looking at a new facility in Gift Lake to help create opportuni-

ties for students in the northern part of our province. We also look at online opportunities like eCampus Alberta, which will have close to 20,000 courses delivered this year and is providing opportunities to many, many students across the province right at home.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. Some programs aren't feasible to deliver online or require specialized facilities. What supports are available for students who do have to relocate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate that many students must travel to access the courses and the programs that they need, so we have a full range of programming and supports for students. We have loans available as well as housing opportunities. We try to make it as easy as possible for students to access those programs. In fact, now a master's degree can be delivered online in Camrose from the University of Alberta, so students can stay in a rural setting while taking a course that's only available in Edmonton.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister: what are you doing to expand the programs that are currently available at rural colleges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important area across the province. Many of our communities want to keep their young people at home as much as possible. I know that right now there are discussions in Red Deer and Medicine Hat about increasing degree opportunities for young people in those communities to be able to stay at home and take an extra degree there. So we're working with them. In fact, this year in our budget there's funding available to allow those schools to work with universities to provide those degree opportunities.

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

Arts Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister of culture. The minister backed off on a decision to cancel the funding of artists associated with schools. He backed off on a decision to discriminate against arts groups and artists associated with municipalities. What was the reasoning behind pushing forward with the cancellation of funding to artists and arts groups associated with universities?

Mr. Blackett: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I didn't back off the funding to schools or to postsecondary. That was somebody in our department who had had that conversation with someone, that was not supported by myself. We're not backing off any cuts because we aren't making any cuts.

Ms Blakeman: Given that the minister is on record as saying, "We all have to take our medicine; we all have to tighten our belts; everybody has to share the burden," why have the artists associated with universities been chosen for special discriminatory action? You have cut their programs.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, yes, I said that we all have to share in our burden. That was in Budget 2010-11. My department had a 16 per cent cut across the board, and we had to share the pain right

across the board, from heritage to the arts to the not-for-profit sector to the Human Rights Commission. This year in the budget, which we will discuss, there is none of that, but we can discuss that at estimates.

Ms Blakeman: Well, the minister has said that artists are very well taken care of, and I'm curious how the minister believes that artists associated with universities are very well taken care of when the funding for their programs was cut and not restored.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, for lots of artists, lots of arts organizations, when you have a 16 per cent cut to your budget – guess what? – everybody has to take a little less. As I said, our budget has not yet been discussed for this year, so any assumption on that will have to be discussed at the estimates.

The Speaker: Members may wish to note that the estimates for the Department of Culture and Community Spirit will be reviewed in this Assembly on the afternoon of March 23.

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

Heartland Electricity Transmission Line (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the 500-kV power lines is proposed to be constructed within or very near to the homes in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. My constituents are very concerned about the need for these lines as well as the negative health, safety, property value, and environmental impacts. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Given that some of the upgrader projects in the heartland area are on hold or have been cancelled . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there has been some confusion or some misunderstanding that somehow the heartland transmission line was only part of the four critical transmission lines to serve the Industrial Heartland and the development there. What is really important, that needs to be on the record, is that the greatest growth area in the province in the next 20 years, in fact I'd say in the country, is the entire northeast part of Alberta.

Also, part of that is cogeneration, wherein . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been brought to my attention that to bury the heartland transmission lines, the cost is 8.9 per cent more than the overhead lines. Once again a question to the Minister of Energy: if this is the case, with safety concerns in mind, wouldn't this be a better option?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I want to finish the first answer because the answer to the supplementary is that that will be a decision made by the Alberta Utilities Commission as part of the hearings that commence next month. But we need to ensure that the fastest growing area of power generation in Alberta is going to be cogeneration from the oil sands, that needs to get into the grid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what cost-related measures are in place to ensure that the building of transmission lines remains

reasonable in terms of construction costs and in terms of burying the line?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, the whole allocation of costs is part of the Utilities Commission hearing that will take place. One of the things that I'm sure will be part of the proposal is that one option is burying the lines. Of course, that's a decision the Utilities Commission will make, and they will provide some options as part of their recommendation, I'm sure.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, you stand still when the chair speaks, please. It's one of the decorum things. I know it's tough. And you're walking now between the chair and the hon. member, which is a no-no. Walk behind, please. Thank you very much.

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

2:20 Health Quality Council Review (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have reviewed the Health Quality Council terms of reference. Given that the Health Quality Council investigation still only has limited access to information, can't compel witnesses, and cannot promise to protect those who might otherwise volunteer to be interviewed, my question is to the minister of health. Will he admit that the Health Quality Council is simply not equipped to crack the culture of fear and agree, instead, to an inquiry process that is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the letter that I wrote on March 12 to the Health Quality Council on page 2 does say, "This independent Review shall be provincial in scope and is to be conducted utilizing Section 9 of the Alberta Evidence Act in order to maintain evidentiary privilege over the provision of documents and evidence of participants." Then I also said, "The Council shall also take whatever steps it deems necessary to maintain confidentiality of the people who participate within this process."

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that does not address the issue of intimacy.

Given that the AMA voice has joined the chorus calling for a public inquiry into intimidation in the health care system, an issue that cannot and will not be addressed through your kangaroo court, why won't the minister of health listen to the health professionals that he's been ignoring and agree to a judicial inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago and over the last several days, in fact, they were asking for the Health Quality Council to come in and do a review. We've now ordered that to be done. It will be independent. They took the first step today. They released a very reasonable, a very sensible set of terms of reference. They've also indicated that they will be appointing "a panel of experts . . . to assist and advise the [HQCA Council] in this review." Let's give them a chance to do that.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the minister denies the health system's culture of intimidation, but given that the current code of conduct orders employees to refrain from publicly discussing confidential information about AHS business and to balance what they say against its impact on the reputation of AHS, how can the minister deny that these directions force health staff every day to ask

whether they should be more worried about patients, the reputation of Alberta Health Services, or their jobs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's what's occurring, but I would like to quote from the open letter that was sent to all physicians yesterday by Alberta Health Services. It says on page 2, "The AHS Code of Conduct does not restrict a physician or other practitioner to speak out, quite the opposite. In essence, we are required to bring our concerns forward," and it goes on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Spring Flooding in Southern Alberta (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, here we go again as residents of the Medicine Hat area brace for new flooding. No. I'm sorry. They're bracing for excessive moisture. The response to last year's excessive moisture was poorly prepared and, in fact, finally contracted out to a private firm to handle. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what tangible changes have been made to ensure that Albertans will see a more timely and better co-ordinated response this year?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the person asking the question is making assumptions that we're going to be facing exactly the same experiences as we did last year. Last year's certainly was a very sudden storm, and the communities were taken unprepared. This year we are monitoring the situation a lot closer. As I identified to the previous member, we are providing \$1 million in funding for temporary flood mitigation efforts in both of the communities out there.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.
The hon. member, please.

Ms Pastoor: Can the minister confirm if the province is still dealing with any outstanding flood claims from last year?

Mr. Goudreau: I think I answered that earlier this week, Mr. Speaker. We are basically about 98 per cent done on the residential claims. There are still a number of claims that are outstanding. As we receive additional information, we process individual applications, and we'll continue to work with individual applicants that were affected last year as time moves along.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Given that Municipal Affairs required an additional \$191 million in unbudgeted funds to help pay for last year's flooding, excessive moisture, should the province not be setting aside more than the \$200,000 it currently budgets for disaster recovery?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, disaster recovery programs are very, very unpredictable, and we don't know when we're going to need them. We've got a process in place to access dollars, and we've been using that particular process. This past year we've declared just about a dozen DRPs, or disaster recovery programs, throughout the province, and we've been able to access those funds as we've needed them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Grain Transportation

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many grain and oilseed farmers in southern Alberta are telling me they are unable to sell or ship their produce due to full elevators and a backed-up shipping system. To the minister of agriculture: what is the reason for the backlog and delay in shipping?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to point out that the problem is primarily in the Canadian Pacific area of the province. I have heard from people myself, and of course it's delays in delivery. CP tells us there are a number of reasons: shortages of rail cars, delays due to extreme weather, avalanches, strained capacity. But I also understand that the Canadian Wheat Board and grain companies such as Viterra are trying to work directly with CP now to speed the system up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: what is your ministry's role in trying to address this issue?

Mr. Hayden: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've worked in a number of areas, and we know that this is a very important issue. We are continuing to encourage our federal counterparts to take action on the issue, and we are asking them to include in that a federal rail freight service review. This just highlights the need for marketing choice for producers. If they had other options, they could ship some through the United States but also find their own customers and make some shipping options available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Back again to the same minister: is there any action that our producers can take to help alleviate the situation in the shipping with CP?

Mr. Hayden: Well, really, Mr. Speaker, the only option available to the producers themselves – and we encourage them to do this – is to pressure CP directly through their MPs to get these issues resolved. We also encourage grain shippers to file a level of service complaint to the Canadian Transportation Agency. We believe that will get them some results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Penhorwood Apartment Evacuations

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency over 350 residents in Fort McMurray who own or rent condos in a seven-building complex are now homeless. The impact is almost like there was an earthquake. They clearly feel there is a state of emergency. Does the Minister of Municipal Affairs, responsible for emergency management in Alberta, feel that this is a state of emergency, and is he taking the appropriate action?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, having been a past Minister of Municipal Affairs, should know better. He is aware of the processes of declaring disaster recovery programs. He was, I believe, minister when those particular buildings were built and was in charge of the Safety Codes Act at that particular time. There is a process in place, and, you know, often a disaster may not be declared if there is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Given that the minister just said no and he's not willing to help the residents, to the minister again: will you declare a state of emergency in helping these almost 400 citizens that are homeless right now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are in touch with the individual municipalities. The municipality is aware of the various services that are available to those individuals that were displaced from the properties. If it's a matter of health, they can work with the ministry of health. If it's a matter of, you know, financial needs and meeting those financial needs, then there are other avenues through the Minister of Employment and Immigration and their particular offices. So there are a number of options that are available to those particular individuals.

Mr. Boutilier: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this minister said that he's out of touch with what is going on, in my interpretation of what he just said, will he help these 400 citizens that are helpless as opposed to giving us this bureaucratic protocol rather than . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] Okay. Okay. Okay. We all know the rule we all agreed to. The hon. member was here yesterday.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're going to do everything we can to help the individual people. There's no doubt, as I indicated before, that we have services that will deal with individuals in situations like this one and in other situations. As I indicated, if residents need emergency support, they can certainly visit one of our Alberta Works offices, and those could help in terms of covering things like utility arrears or damage deposits or rental arrears.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:30 School Bus Strobe Lights

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from parents of schoolchildren in my constituency who feel that bus drivers are sometimes unsure of exactly when to use their strobe lights. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Would he revisit the use of highway and rules of road regulations and make any updates to ensure that strobe lights are being used as intended?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very proud to say that this government has taken significant steps to improve school bus safety, and we're told we're leading the country with our comprehensive approach. All 10 recommendations from the school bus safety report have been fully implemented, including mandatory strobe lights. We want to make sure that our regulations are clear, so we will work with school boards and the school bus industry to clarify what's necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that weather conditions change quickly in Alberta, would it not be appropriate to have our bus drivers keep the strobe lights on all the time when travelling on the highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of strobe lights is to alert drivers that a school bus is ahead. The regulation requires that school bus drivers use strobe lights in situations of low visibility, when it's foggy or it's snowing or it's raining heavily, or at any

time that increased visibility is needed. This is all about keeping our children safe, so if there is some clarification needed on the issue, we'll do that.

Mrs. Leskiw: My second supplementary is to the same minister. Given that other jurisdictions mandate that strobe lights stay on whenever a school bus is in a rural area, would this minister commit to the same policy here in Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the school bus industry contributed greatly to the school bus safety report, but there was not a recommendation that came forward in that way. The recommendation implemented was to have mandatory strobe lights on busses to increase safety in poor visibility. We don't want the strobe lights to become routine. Our goal is to have them used to bring greater attention in specific situations, and that's very, very important.

Municipal Zoning Exemption for Universities

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, section 121 of the Post-secondary Learning Act exempts universities from municipal zoning controls of any form, whether they concern land use, traffic, parking, density, design, community impact, or anything else. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: what's the reason that some universities are granted this pretty remarkable privilege?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our three residential universities in the province of Alberta do fall under a specific act which gives them broad, sweeping powers over traffic and planning on their sites, but we also know that they must work with the municipality and the neighbours to ensure that they don't encroach and that their facilities and sites work well within the municipality that they're in.

Dr. Taft: My question is to the same minister. Given that a small-business owner wanting to remove an interior wall or a homeowner wanting to build a deck or a developer wanting to put up a condominium all must comply with municipal zoning, is it fair that some universities are completely exempt from zoning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. That's an opinion.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All I can speak to is the legislation that does exist, that these universities were created under, which does give them powers over how they develop, how their buildings are developed, and how their transportation is done. It still all falls under building codes and other codes within the province.

Dr. Taft: Well, again to the same minister. Given that Mount Royal and MacEwan universities don't yet appear to have the privilege of a complete exemption from municipal zoning, will that privilege be extended to them or not, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both of our new baccalaureate universities were developed under other legislation, and they do fall under all municipal bylaws for planning and that. We did give them some new powers last year over issuing fines and collecting fines for traffic violations on their campuses, but on other issues they do fall under the Municipal Government Act in planning for the community.

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

Telecommunications Tower Siting

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Calgary-Montrose passionately expressed earlier today, siting of cellphone towers is a frustrating issue for many families, homeowners, and communities. Last April I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs a question on this, and he indicated he would look into it. My question is to the minister. Has he been able to work with communities, municipalities, and the federal government to bring clarity to this issue?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, all three, and since it was brought up last year, I have specifically written to the federal minister responsible for Industry Canada in regard to this particular issue. I've raised consultation concerns pertaining to the cellphone towers. I'm still waiting for his reply to my letters.*

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is: does the minister see that there is there a role for him or his department to assist communities and municipalities in dealing with these challenges with telecommunications companies, the CRTC, and the federal government?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, telecommunications companies must apply to Industry Canada for a licence to operate an installation at each specific location. As part of this licensing process Industry Canada requires that the companies contact the city, in this case the city of Calgary, for input. The city is to review these referrals, then indicate whether or not the proposed installations can be supported. We've written to the large centres about their role in this particular issue, and they've indicated they have procedures in place now . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: I'm good.

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

Castle Special Management Area

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ghost-Waiparous, Indian Graves, McLean Creek, and currently the Castle either wilfully through this government's failure to legislate and enforce the land-use framework or through its blind-eye neglect have been turned into resource extraction battlegrounds, worsened by the toleration of massive cumulative illegal off-roader wilderness destruction. To the Minister of SRD: are you aware that almost half of the trails in the Castle-Crown land-use area have been illegally carved by outlaw off-roaders?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the only answer I can give to that is that I'm not personally aware of any outlaws in the Castle area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that the minister is unaware . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the preamble rule, please.

Mr. Chase: Yes, sir. Why other than during the singular May long weekend public relations show of co-ordinated ministerial enforcement are areas, including the Castle-Crown, abandoned to block clear-cutters and off-trail outlaws due to departmental understaffing?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member opposite has evidence of outlaws in the Castle, he should report that to the police.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be tabling the documents supporting the complaint.

The Speaker: Yes. We're going to move on, though.

Mr. Chase: To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: will you finally put an end to your government's sanctioned multi-use madness in the Castle-Crown and the decades-long discussion of destruction by creating the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp provincial wilderness park?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing with respect to Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Sustainable Resource Development working together is that we're developing a trail system for the province of Alberta. We hope that we'll have a DAO in place that would assist in, number one, the development; number two, the operation; number three, the policing; and number four, the financing of these trails so that all Albertans can enjoy the great outdoors in this province.

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

Electricity Prices

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing concerns about our electricity system. In particular, my constituents are uneasy with the high electricity prices they've had to pay in the past as well as the potential for higher prices in the future. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How can you ensure that the electrical system is operating as efficiently as possible to give Albertans lower prices for power and have it available when and where they need it?

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that Alberta electricity prices are at about the same rate today that they were in 2002. We have some of the most competitive rates, and that's primarily because our generation market is deregulated. Unlike some other provinces that have Crown corporations or try to meddle in the marketplace, our generation is deregulated.

As far as whether consumers are receiving a fair price, Mr. Speaker, that's really part of the purview of the utility . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Since 2008, when the provincial energy strategy was released, what specifically has Alberta Energy done with respect to providing reasonable electricity prices?

Mr. Liepert: I think it needs to be stated, Mr. Speaker, that the Department of Energy has really nothing to do with setting prices. We have a deregulated retail market as well as a generation market. When the government moved to deregulation a number of years ago, at that time I think there were about three companies – ATCO, EPCOR, and Enmax – which were retailing electricity.

*See page 454, left column, paragraph 5

Both ATCO and EPCOR have vacated that market, but we now have some half a dozen different retailers who are offering a number of options to retailers throughout the province.

Mr. Benito: My second supplemental to the same minister: what is your ministry doing to ensure that competitiveness remains in Alberta's retail electricity market?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said earlier, we took the initiative – I don't know; I think it's 10, 12 years ago – to ensure that we have a competitive retail market, Mr. Speaker. What we're going to do is continue to ensure that that market works appropriately.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the Oral Question Period for today. Thank you very much for your co-operation. Today 20 members were recognized. There were 118 questions and responses.

In a few seconds from now we will continue with the daily Routine, which still has one additional member participating in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Online Parenting Resource

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and share information on a government of Alberta website for caregivers with children aged zero to six. Research has shown that children's early experiences set the foundation for success in school and life, and parents and caregivers play the most important, significant role in a child's early years.

It is essential that parents, families, and care providers have easy access to available services, information, and support networks to ensure that young children have the resources and supports to realize their potential. There's a lot of information out there, especially on the Internet. The challenge is in sifting through all that information and determining what is both useful and reliable. To help make the process less time consuming, the government of Alberta has developed the Raising Children website: www.raisingchildren.alberta.ca.

The Raising Children website brings together all government information on services and programs targeted at families and caregivers. Other credible sources are also included, including Alberta Health Services and Health Link. Using the Raising Children website will help parents and caregivers make informed decisions. It will also put them in faster contact with the appropriate sources at the most opportune time. On this website you'll find a wide range of information, including health information for coping with crying, immunizations, saving for your children's education, information on government grants to support your savings, information for parents, and multiple supports for foster and kin parents and programs available for those raising aboriginal children.

The information is easy to find as it is divided into different categories by age, topic, and a section called Parents Like Me. I encourage all parents and caregivers to visit the site and to share the link with others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 21, 2011, written questions 1, 2, and 11 will be accepted; written questions 6, 7, 10, and 12 will be dealt with. Also on March 21, 2011, motions for returns 1, 4, and 10 will be accepted and 3, 5, and 9 will be dealt with.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Anderson: Yesterday at your request I dutifully obtained five notarized copies of the transcript of the interview with Dr. Lloyd Maybaum that was done by CTV news at 6 on Monday, March 14, 2011. The doctor said:

There's a plain fear . . . you'll lose your position, you might lose operating room hours. There's any number of different ways that people are fearful and have experience the backlash that can occur when you speak out.

. . . [There's] a real clear and present problem in the health care system and anyone who suggests that this is preposterous, you know, quite frankly is insulting to health care workers. This is the kind of culture we have worked in for many, many years.

I'll table those copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I've got the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for a tabling. Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you have one for yourself as well?

Ms Pastoor: I do as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, bear with me. I think I've got about seven here.

On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition from yesterday I'm tabling the requested copies in which he quoted Dr. Nunes, who asked for a public inquiry and agreed that, indeed, there existed intimidation and fear when one spoke out.

This is from a quote on March 16, again from the Leader of the Official Opposition from yesterday. It was Dr. Parks who had said: the public is right to fully demand we get to the bottom of this; anything less wouldn't be acceptable. That's from Wednesday, which was yesterday.

Also, from today a quote from the president of the Alberta Medical Association's letter.

My own is the cheque that I send out every month to a food bank, of course, with my mantra to ensure that AISH is indexed as are MLAs' salaries.

I have some letters to table from Drs. Grant and Christine Kennedy, who are both emergency doctors, saying that they're very concerned about the probable cuts to continuing medical education reimbursement, physician and family support, and the physician retention programs.

Also, another letter from a Dr. Francis, another emergency doc, who said that he is also concerned with the probable cuts to the physician and family support programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you have tablings, too?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, sir. Four.

The Speaker: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: The first is an e-mail correspondence from Darlene Natalia Konduc, who was a nephrology nurse-clinician at the University of Alberta at the time that Dr. Anne Fanning was there and was shuffled out by the government and is speaking up for the need to support doctors.

These next two are both regarding concerns about funding cuts. They are practising family physicians in Calgary. Olga de Sanctis is concerned about the funding cuts upcoming in Health and Wellness and their impact on the delivery of care. Another, an e-mail from Dr. Karen Zwiers, who is a clinical lecturer in Calgary and has been in practice for 11 years, concerning cuts to primary care and the primary care networks and competitive fee increases for physicians.

Finally, from a constituent of Edmonton-Centre, Dennis LeFebvre. He is a resident in the emergency medicine program at the University of Alberta and is concerned about any possible cuts there to the physician and family support program.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the hon. the Premier referred to a letter from the president of the Alberta Medical Association. If I was listening correctly, it may well have been tabled, but if not, in any event, I'll table it again. If it's a duplicate, the Clerk can sort that out. It's the letter dated March 17, 2011, in which it very clearly states, "The AMA will support and cooperate with such an approach [i.e., a public inquiry] if this occurs," which is quite different from the way it was quoted by the Leader of the Opposition and the member of the Wildrose in their questions earlier today.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. The first comes from Global Forest Watch, backing up my concerns about how badly cut up the Castle is by both clear-cutting and roads. The contact information is www.globalforestwatch.ca.

My second tabling is a letter from Beverly Kaltenbruner. She has a very telling comment here. "While hiking I have documented with my camera and my heart the massive destruction of watershed, forest, & habitat due to 'environmentally conscious, sustained growth' logging methods/operations."

The concerns of Beverly are reflected by the following 25 individuals, who have also sent me correspondence, Mr. Speaker: Matt Holland, Geoffrey Scatchard, Patrick Thompson, Margaret Johnson, Michael Marcoux, Wendy Menghi, Jeanne Keegan-Henry, Helen Hertel, Peter Stockdale, Ken Farquharson, J. Hobart, Joanne Wallace, Silvaine Zimmermann, Romilly Cavanaugh, Barry Cogswell, Randall White, Elizabeth Zaikow, Andrea Lee, Robert Blair, Susanna Jani, Mary Stewart, Ursula Lowrey, Heather Schamehorn, Margaret McKea, and Tanya Ulyyatt.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I would like to table, please, a copy of a letter that I received on December 2, 2010. This letter was from the Employment and Immigration minister. He was trying to explain, unsuccessfully, why there are two sets of numbers regarding claim durations. The first set of numbers is in the WCB 2008 annual report, and the second set is in the 2008 Occupational Injuries and Diseases report from his own department.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to table the appropriate number of reports from the president's letter dated the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day, and be very specific that right at the start of this letter the AMA supports a public inquiry. They say that the fact that these perceptions are out there is still a source of major concern. How do we . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the document has already been tabled.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. This is a letter from a regional council, from an exchange this afternoon with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that I received this morning. The letter is requesting support from the province that the city at this point has not received – and I table this from the regional council of Wood Buffalo – in helping the 400 residents that are now homeless.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, in response to a question raised by Mr. MacDonald, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, during Oral Question Period on February 28, 2011, regarding fees for vehicle registrations and licence plates; in response to questions raised by Mrs. Forsyth, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, during Oral Question Period on March 2, 2011, regarding the legal name change process.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point under Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for the week commencing Monday, the 21st of March.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For next week, as the House is aware, March 21 is private members' business.

March 22 in the afternoon Committee of Supply on Environment.

Wednesday, March 23, in the afternoon Committee of Supply on Culture and Community Spirit as per the schedule that's published on the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 24, in the afternoon for second reading Bill 1, Asia Advisory Council Act; Bill 5, Notice to the Attorney General Act; Bill 7, Corrections Amendment Act, 2011; Bill 8, Missing Persons Act; Bill 10, Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011; Bill 11, Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011; Bill 12, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011; Bill 14, Wills and Succession Amendment Act, 2011; Bill 15, Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011. Under Committee of the Whole Bill 4, Securities Amendment Act, 2011; and Bill 6, Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. Of course, we won't be able to accomplish all of that in an hour and a half, so we will as usual discuss with the opposition which ones we'll actually bring forward and in what order.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on a point of order.

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order from Standing Order 23(b)(i),(c),(e), and (j). I believe they all apply. The basis of the comment that I'm referring to was – I don't have the Blues in front of me; they're not available yet. Basically, the Premier, referring to the Wildrose caucus, says: this coming from a party that sent 30 doctors over to Vietnam. Clearly that is hog-wash. It's misleading the House in every possible way. It's just a completely untrue statement, the insinuation also being that a former member of this House – he's been called all sorts of things in here.

It's amazing. They talk about using the privilege of this House to impugn people outside of the House and how inappropriate that is. They keep accusing people on this side of the House of doing that, and then they go and do the exact same thing with a former colleague. It's really quite shameful.

The other thing, too, is that former colleague, in fact, is not a . . .

The Speaker: I'm not aware that that was part of what was stated today. Let's deal with the point of order, though, okay?

Mr. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to explain. I'm just trying to make a complete argument. That's all I'm trying to do. I'm sorry if I'm not being clear. The point being that he's referring to the party . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. You were here yesterday. You heard us have the discussion that points of order are not to be used for the purpose of continuation of debate. What was stated today – and I have the Blues in front of me. This is the Premier. He looked at me, and he said, "Mr. Speaker, comments coming from a party that just sent 30 physicians to Vietnam." At that point I recognized a point of order from the hon. Member from Airdrie-Chestermere. Let's focus on that item. Please go forward.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. On that point, sir, I will go and say this. If the member continues with that same logic, the fact that this person has joined our party, who is not a chief adviser, who is not on staff, not being paid – if they continue to say that that person represents this party and continues to represent this party and their policy, then I'm assuming that they, too, would assume that the fact that Ken Hughes, who is leading up Alberta Health Services, was advocating for a private luxury hospital in Mexico would mean that the government supported private health care as well.

Now, of course that's an asinine statement to make because this government does not support private health care. We know that. I know that. I don't think the NDP knows that, but I know that.

So if I'd said in the House, "because Ken Hughes supports a for-profit hospital and the government hired him to be the head of AHS, this government supports private health care," so, too, is it just as asinine to say that because somebody joins our party who happens to be involved overseas in Vietnam at a private hospital and who happens to be a member of our party, therefore this party promotes private health or, even worse, shipped 30 doctors over there.

It's completely untrue. It's misleading, it's false, and it's pathetic. They need to withdraw the comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting that

within the space of two weeks they embrace as a chief policy adviser somebody who is introducing their leader and is speaking for their party, embrace it and make a big public display of it, and then two weeks later they want to disavow the connection. He's no longer the health adviser, I guess, no longer the person who speaks for them with respect to health policy and gives them advice. It's absolutely amazing how this party is positional – I think that's the best I could say – with respect to their philosophy and their sense of direction.

3:00

In any event, I think it's clear that the Wildrose Party couldn't ship anything anywhere; therefore, I do think that it probably was a little bit over the top to say that the party just shipped 30 physicians to Vietnam. So on behalf of the Premier – and I do have his permission – I would withdraw that remark and apologize for suggesting that they shipped 30 physicians to Vietnam when, clearly, it is their chief health policy person who's involved with the private hospital there and there's no indication that their party is involved directly or indirectly in that hospital.

The Speaker: Well, we've heard an apology; we've heard a withdrawal; we've heard a clarification. It's now time for Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 13
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board, Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, any time one gets a chance to examine in detail the budgeting habits of this government, I think one has to take the opportunity. I had a meeting earlier today, and I was trying to explain to citizens how we were for the fourth year in a row in a budget deficit and how the sustainability fund was being reduced to almost nothing and that if we're not careful when the election is called, all the money that's left in the stability fund, slightly over \$5 billion, will be committed to grip-and-grin photo opportunities as this government tries to buy its way with taxpayers' money into another four-year term. Now, certainly, I was taken aback, and I'm sure if the provincial finance minister was with me, he would have been taken aback and he probably would have been embarrassed. This group could not believe that it was four years in a row that this government somehow managed to have a deficit budget.

The first couple of years they were small. They've gotten bigger, and who knows how the end of this year will look. Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about 2011-12. One of the first things I do in the morning now is look at the exchange rate. The exchange rate is moderated when you compare us to the Americans and their dollar, but certainly if that exchange rate was to remain constant for the entire fiscal year, we'd be looking at a loss of at least \$600

million from the minister's projections. So when this government stands up and requests an appropriation amount to get started in the fiscal year – it's really no different than an allowance – questions have to be asked. What are the plans? What are we going to do to control costs?

In committee we noted the \$2.2 billion that is requested for health care. We have seen over the years – and people are really starting to take notice of it now – the great cost of the continual changes that have been made by this government without any plan, without any cost-benefit analysis to see what, if anything, would work. Nothing was done in that respect. But we've seen the quality of care go down, we have seen growing wait-lists, we have seen diverse services around the province, and we've seen rapid cost inflation.

Ultimately for who knows what reasons the government decided in March of 2008, three years ago almost precisely, to create one big superboard. We disbanded the nine RHAs, the Cancer Board, the Mental Health Board, and we got this one superboard with an unelected board of directors. Some of them got so dissatisfied with this government – I don't know if it was over budget issues or what it was over.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: They got so dissatisfied with this government that they resigned.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. The hon. Government House Leader has a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've been listening intently. I know that the bill that's under debate is interim supply, which is about the provision of money for the first few months of the year for government operations while we continue deliberation of the details of the budget. The hon. member is talking about government creating one board for health. He hasn't touched, so far as I can tell, for the last five minutes of his talk on anything to do with interim supply, so I'm wondering if there's anything relevant in what he has to say at all.

The Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. There certainly isn't a point of order. The minister clearly was not paying attention, and I would appreciate it if he would pay attention. I haven't even been speaking for five minutes, to start with.*

In this bill here, Bill 13, Mr. Speaker, this government is requesting \$2.2 billion for health. I'm astonished that he would even suggest that there's a point of order here. If we cannot ask questions on which direction this government is going with their spending of that allocation and examine their past habits and what they have done to public health care, I'm just astonished. Quite frankly I'm disappointed in this hon. member that he would even suggest that there's a point of order here.

The Speaker: Well, now I'm totally confused. The hon. Government House Leader gets up on a point of order, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar gets up and says: yes, there is a point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: I didn't say that there was a point of order.

The Speaker: Yes, you did. You absolutely said that right at the start, but I understood that that was not what you meant. It's what you said, though.

Let's continue with the debate, okay? There is 20 minutes allocated to the second speaker on third reading. We'll continue, and we'll focus on the appropriation bill, which is Bill 13.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You both agreed there was a point of order, so I'm not saying anything more.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that I appreciate your guidance on that point of order, but if my mother was alive, she would say to you: you have a vivid imagination.

The Speaker: Your mother would be an astute person.

Mr. MacDonald: She was a teacher by profession.

The Speaker: Your mother must have been brilliant. I hope it was genetic. [interjections] Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: I didn't hear that.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Now, when we vote on this \$2.2 billion allocation that's requested in Bill 13, we have to examine this government's previous spending habits with health care. We have seen total spending in billions of dollars – and we even go back only nine years. I know, Mr. Speaker, that immediate past history is not an interest of this government, but in 2003 we had spending in health care of a little less than \$7 billion. It has certainly gone up and beyond that in 2011. In 2012 this \$2.2 billion request will be supplemented by an additional 13 and a half billion dollars, if not more.

Citizens all over the province, whether the government wants to admit it or not, are looking at these health care expenditures, whether they're in this bill or in previous years, and they're asking themselves questions. Where did the money go? Where did it go? Are we getting better value? Are we getting more service? Are the emergency room wait times going down? Are we waiting a lot less for access to orthopedic surgery or to other types of surgery? The answer, clearly, is: no, we're not. So we're spending more, and we seem to be getting less.

3:10

Now, an example of this would be facility-based emergency and outpatient services. There has been a \$350 million increase over five years, and the emergency room situation seems to be getting worse. I know there was a photograph in the *Edmonton Journal* today of the minister of health, and he was pointing at a chart. What exactly it had to do with that article, I don't know, but it was in there. It was there. What I would like to see and what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would like to see with at least a portion of this \$2.2 billion that's requested here for health is a look at hiring more emergency staff, expanding primary care networks, and expanding community health networks. If we were to do that, perhaps at some time in the future we could start reducing some of these budgets, particularly for emergency room care because we wouldn't need as much emergency room care, and we would increase service and decrease wait times. I know the Alberta Liberal Party has had some good ideas that have been adopted

*See page 457, right column, paragraph 5

by this government in the past, and you would be welcome to have a look at this suggestion as well.

Another example before we pass this bill, Mr. Speaker, is the IT expenses, or the information technology expenses, of Alberta Health Services. Obviously, they're going to get a portion of this \$2.2 billion. Now, if you look at 2007, they got slightly less than \$190 million. The next year they were up around \$230 million. The next year after that they were up to \$270 million. In 2010 it was almost \$300 million, and then the next year it snuck up to \$335 million or even more. That's an 80 per cent increase in five years in IT costs. Yet with this bill the government is looking for just an unlimited credit card allowance, if I could use that, with health care. We've got to get some of these costs under control.

The *Globe and Mail* had a very interesting article, I believe on January 26 of this year, regarding IT costs and health care systems across the country. We know it's happened in Ontario. We know it's happened in some other provinces. We've got to ensure that we're getting value for the money that we're spending, and with this government, unfortunately, we can't guarantee that. Maybe the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has more to say on this. I don't know. When you see these 80 per cent increases in IT costs over five years, it doesn't include all the health information systems within the ministry, and that was another \$75 million last year.

The government members may not want to hear what I have to say, but here's what the office of the Auditor General of Alberta had to say:

- Improve the oversight of electronic health records systems by:
 - maintaining an integrated delivery plan that aligns with the strategic plan
 - improving systems to regularly report costs, timelines, progress and outcomes

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Government House Leader and Minister of Education, doesn't want to hear my take on this, I would encourage him to follow up with the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this budget again, the \$2.2 billion for health care, we know a portion of that is going to Alberta Health Services. It was interesting to note that Alberta Health Services put their third-quarter financial statements up on the Internet over this past weekend. It's very interesting to see that they do have a surplus, and they're going to be able to pay off their deficit from last year, and they're going to have, I think, roughly \$300 million left. They're going to spend \$200 million of it on equipment somewhere. I don't know where, but that's essentially what's going on there.

We were told, Mr. Speaker, by this government, when they created the superboard, that they would get management staff under control and there would be a lot fewer managers. We were going to have a lot less administration. We certainly know that with administrative expenses that hasn't happened. But if we look at the management staff – and I'm going to take the risk of going back quickly three years – we will see that there were roughly 3,480 total management staff in the nine regions and the health board and the Cancer Board. So these were total management staff reporting to the board and, ultimately, the minister. The next year that jumped to close to 3,700, and this was at a time when we were told: "Hold on. Be patient. All this will work out, and we will have a lot less management." It didn't happen. But in the year 2009-10, before we had this budget, it did go down slightly to 3,540.

Now, did the costs go down? Naturally, a curious Progressive Conservative would wonder: what is the total cost of all these managers? If we're going to give a billion dollars or \$1.4 billion to

Alberta Health Services to keep them going from April 1 until the budget is passed, what kind of money are they spending over there on management staff? Well, it's significant. It was even significant in 2007-08. It was \$407 million or \$408 million. It jacked up to 470 some-odd million dollars in 2008-09, and it has sort of maintained that level. Even though there are a few less managers, it would be, I think, around \$472 million to be exact.

I wasn't impressed with the pledge, or the promise, that was made that there would be fewer administrative costs and that there would certainly be fewer managers if we went with the superboard. That hasn't happened. So we need to consider the information, and we also need to remember the information when we're providing organizations like Alberta Health Services money from the general revenue fund, and this is exactly what's happening with Bill 13.

Also, while I have the time, I would like to speak a little bit about Justice. In Justice here the request is for \$68.7 million. I'm wondering if, in the course of debate, someone in the Department of Justice could go back, because I just don't have the time, Mr. Speaker. I don't know who is doing it, the Public Affairs Bureau or the Premier's office – I don't know – but all the researchers that we hired in our caucus have been hired away by this government just like that. We train them, get them up to speed, and they're hired away. It's sort of a curious pattern that at the fourth year of every term there is an exodus of Alberta Liberal caucus researchers to the government. The hiring freeze that they suggest to the public is on, doesn't apply to our researchers. So I'm going to have to get the Justice department to research this item for me before I would vote for this bill.

3:20

The legal services that Justice provides to each and every department of this government: I would like to know what that budget was. Let's go back eight years, to 2002. What would it be for legal aid? Let's compare what this government is spending over an eight-year period on themselves and their own departments and what they're willing to spend on individuals who simply cannot afford to hire a lawyer, but they need good, sound legal advice and good, sound legal direction. I certainly would like a response from the folks over in Justice on this. How much do you spend on yourselves over an eight-year period, and how much are you willing to spend on others to help them out?

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly thank the honourable House, particularly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, for allowing me this opportunity to get some questions on the record regarding this government's spending habits.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up in third reading of Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011, and to continue, I guess, with the questions and the concerns that we have because of the major deficit, the cash to expenses, that this government is running. I feel that with all the discussions that go on in the Treasury Board and behind closed doors and with the numbers that they hopefully have and we request to see, we are unable to see in this very short Appropriation Act, with a huge amount that the Treasury Board is requesting, the billions of dollars – it's just a major concern, with the \$3.7 billion deficit that we're running, that we're not going over the specifics of these requests in detail.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We start off, you know, under the government with Aboriginal Affairs, Advanced Education and Technology, Agriculture and Rural Development, Children and Youth Services, Culture and Community Spirit, Education, Employment and Immigration, Energy, Environment, Executive Council, Finance and Enterprise, Health and Wellness, Housing and Urban Affairs, Infrastructure, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Community Supports, Service Alberta, Solicitor General and Public Security, Sustainable Resource Development, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Treasury Board all needing supplemental interim supply.

The paramount question that first comes forward is: why? I would ask why because this government isn't being efficient in its timelines with bringing forward the budget in a timely manner. They delayed coming back to this House, and you have to ask: why would they delay coming back to this House? It was one of the Premier's first promises when he got in. I remember that. I thought: "Man, that's going to be great. We're going to get in there. There's going to be a budget the second week in February. We can debate it and pass it before year-end on March 31."

It was interesting for me the other day to learn from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that, in fact, in the last 15 years there was one time that we didn't have to have interim supply. So the question has to be asked: why can we not do that every year? I think that the government is fully to blame for why we cannot do that. They fail to act in an efficient and appropriate manner, and they seem to think: well, we can just push \$2.2 billion through quickly; it won't take too much time. And, again, no details.

It's always interesting to me that with opposition parties they say: oh, we oppose everything. I very much disagree with that. We oppose those things which we feel are not in the best interests of Albertans, and I'm very much opposed to the exorbitant amount of money that this government continues to spend without properly informing the opposition, the citizens of Alberta what those priorities are or where they're going to spend that money. Any budgetary process that one goes through, the first thing you look at is how much money you have. Then you look at: what are our needs, what are our priorities, and how do we match those?

I don't know too many people personally that don't have to worry about budgeting. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, this government just seems to have a gold-plated credit card with no limits. It sounds like some of those fancy, rich children that go around the world spending lots of money with no limits, and every now and then daddy calls up and says: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. This is getting a little bit out of control here. What are you spending your money on?"

Two or three weeks ago the *National Post* was interesting to me. I read an article about a Saudi prince that needed to be reined in because he was spending \$15 billion annually. He was called in, and they said: you're going to have a budget of just \$300 million per month. What a budget. But it aligns with this government in doing that.

The point is, though, Mr. Speaker, that we as opposition would be more than happy to sit down and go through and items where we would say: "Yes. We agree. This should be taken out of there. We'll wait a couple of years on this one. This one shouldn't be this high on the priorities. We shouldn't be starting these projects." When we're not given that opportunity, it's very hard to say: "Well, yes. We want to support and vote for this budget." Why and how could we do that? It doesn't make any sense to just willy-nilly go along and vote for this interim supply while saying: well, this is just what we need. No.

It's very disappointing to me as a sitting MLA, going door-knocking and talking to individuals, and they ask: well, where are

we spending all this money? And I say: I wish that I had access to the books so that we could really see where they're spending the money. We can see this after it comes in. The south hospital is going to cost, I think, \$1.3 billion, way over budget. The renovations of the federal building: some say it's \$135 million to \$270 million. But we've already started that, and there's nothing we can do. That's the problem. That's the reason why you budget.

Why we debate these things is: before we start, let's look and analyze and prioritize. This government fails to do it, fails to allow us to do it. Those decisions, those lists are behind closed doors. We have no access despite the number of times that we've asked. "Please show us your 20-year infrastructure plan. Please show us your five-year one. Let's see your priorities. What are they? How many miles of highway do you plan on doing and where?" It's critical.

I continue to drive and put a lot of miles on my vehicle every year to get around this wonderful province and listen to the concerns in rural Alberta and urban and north and south. Generally the majority of our roads are in decent shape, but boy we have some that are really problematic. Highway 63 is one of those, yet we haven't seen any movement going forward on that. There has been no pavement actually laid in two years. Again, that's not adequate. We need to change that.

So there are many, many concerns, Mr. Speaker, in this interim supply. I have to say, you know: without information, how can you blindly vote for something like this? It's inadequate to present. Any board of directors of any company would find this unacceptable when the numbers were presented. I very much feel that same way, that these numbers should be presented in full and open view that the public can see.

The minister of finance says: oh, you just want to politicize the list. I think it would do just the opposite. If the list was actually opened and could be discussed and the reasons were there, there would be much less political maneuvering that would go on if, in fact, the list was there. A person could look and say: well, why are we doing this overpass in this area? When you look at the count, you look at the problems, you look at the deaths, these are the areas where we need it. But when the government waits, makes the announcement that this is what we're doing, well – okay – what were the other ones on the list? We don't know. How do we prioritize when we don't know? They won't given us the information.

3:30

Things need to change, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that it's not possible to vote in support of this without more information. I hope, as the minister of finance said I believe yesterday in Committee of the Whole, that they're prepared to look at the format and what they're going to present for next year. I do hope that we can sit down and come up with a much better system so that next year we can actually be discussing the items rather than a few lines and a few numbers, that we can actually be discussing the plans and the priorities for the people of Alberta and where we can spend our tax dollars most effectively to increase our quality of life and enjoyment here in the province.

With that, I'll sit down and let someone else speak on this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I won't speak for too long here, but I just

need to reinforce a message to the government that I've made at other times in the past when we've debated interim supply. This legislation, if we had a better budgetary process, would be unnecessary. The fact of the matter is that we should be debating and voting on the budget long before the beginning of the fiscal year so that everything can be in place.

It wouldn't of course just mean that we wouldn't have to spend time in this Assembly on interim supply bills, but it would make a real difference for all kinds of people out in Alberta who depend on public funding. I'm thinking, for example, of various nonprofit groups that provide important social services, the organizations who run shelters or who run all kinds of other facilities or lots of other organizations who are actually left hanging financially.

Mr. Oberle: Vote for the bill, then. We have interim supply. That's the point of it.

Dr. Taft: I'm getting encouraged by the Member for Peace River, the Solicitor General. He likes what I'm saying, I think.

My point was that until we have a proper budgeting system in place as a government, these interim supply bills get debated. Until the budget itself is passed, all kinds of people out in the community are left wondering what financial support they will be getting. I've gone around. I've talked with all kinds of people from north to south, east to west in this province who plead with me to urge the government to come up with a better budgeting system. They have staff. They've got bills. They've got contracts for rent and so on. They're left until very, very late in the process before they know whether they will get provincial funding or not. That's simply unfair, and it's, frankly, very inefficient.

There is a solution that would mean that next year and other years we wouldn't need to go through this kind of debate, and that would be to have the budget brought in earlier, have the debate occur earlier, have the vote earlier. It's just simple good management, Mr. Speaker, and it's a mystery to me why we don't see that done by this government. It used to be done. It's absolutely doable. There would be all kinds of benefits to it. I would urge this government to next year get on top of their budgeting process six or eight weeks sooner in the calendar year and have everything dealt with so we don't need these kinds of interim supply bills.

Those are my comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The hon. member for – the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. That will do just nicely, too, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011. I just want to echo some of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, that this bill should be unnecessary and that I don't think it's good financial management of the province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, had this Assembly been called when it was originally planned to be and had the budget been brought forward immediately after that happened, we would have passed the budget now in its entirety, and we wouldn't have required it.

But what happened was that the government decided that they had to go out on a cabinet tour. They were really kind of worried about what people were thinking, and they wanted to get their message out, so they postponed the Legislative Assembly session. They went out and talked to people all over the province, and suddenly they found out that people didn't like them very much. They cut that off, came back, the Premier resigned, and they decided: you know, we'd better go to plan B.

You know, this is pretty typical of how the government operates. Instead of having a systematic financial and legislative framework that they work within, they're always changing things around because, well, they're always screwing up, Mr. Speaker. People get mad, and they decide that they better get out there and talk to people, and then they find out that, well, it's kind of past time to get your message out. It's a little bit too late. So they dropped the cabinet tour, they rushed back to the Assembly, the Premier quit, and they figured: "Well, let's start over again. It's worked for us in the past when we get into a lot of trouble. We bring in a new leader, and everybody will like them, and they'll forget what's been going on." Well, I think that worked when Premier Klein came in, but I don't think it's going to work again.

I think that it is, frankly, unnecessary for us to be discussing an interim supply bill. Had the government stuck to its responsibilities as a government instead of trying to play politics – you know, who knows what other rabbits they're going to try and pull out of the hat in order to avoid what's coming to them in the next election? Hopefully, we're going to see a government that is prepared to put the management of the public finances and the legislative process ahead of their own short-term political needs. I'm prepared to commit, Mr. Speaker, that a New Democratic Party government will do just that.

Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. On the bill, Bill 13. I talked a little bit about Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011, yesterday in committee, and I would echo a lot of the same sentiments of the other opposition colleagues in this Legislature, that I don't see why we should even be here debating this bill.

Mr. Hancock: You don't need to.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. There is no need to. You're right. We don't need to, as the House leader from the government says. As opposition we could all just turn our heads, close our eyes, plug our ears, and say: "Nothing bad is happening. Nothing bad is happening. Just business as usual. Business as usual." But we don't do that because our duty as an opposition is to make sure that when the government does dumb things, we point them out to the public so that voters can have the opportunity to remove them from their position in the next election should they continue to do those dumb things. Clearly, we are on the road to such a time, if every piece of evidence is not ignored, anyway.

3:40

I look at some of these figures and, again, the amount, the sheer magnitude of what we're approving here, being almost \$5 billion on a little piece of paper this big, a few pieces of paper, actually. Sorry. There are more than one. There are two pieces of paper stapled together, and in these two pieces of paper we will approve \$5 billion. I have no idea and neither does anyone in this House know other than maybe some pencil-pusher in the back of some government department what this \$5 billion is paying for. We know that some of it's going to education, \$643 million – that's good – and \$300,000 of that is going to capital investment. That's not too promising.

But we don't know what that money is being spent on. We're assuming there are some salaries in there, we're assuming there are a few other things in there, but what's it being spent on? We don't know because they don't say. Frankly, we could be hiring a

circus to come in and march around. We could have the circus and the clowns march around all the different schools to teach them about the circus.

Mr. Mason: How the government runs things.

Mr. Anderson: About how government runs things; that's right.

The point is that we don't know because we don't have a clue what that \$643 million is. Could you imagine running a budget this way in any kind of corporation or school board or union? Could you imagine running anything this way, coming to a board of directors and saying: "Here's our budget. It's \$4 billion. It's two pages thick?" I mean, it would be laughable. It is laughable. Yet this is how we approve budgets or interim supply appropriation in the province of Alberta. This is how we do this in the province of Alberta.

It is no fluke that we are running a \$6.2 billion cash shortfall and vapourizing our savings for future generations. It's because of silliness like this, where you can ram through \$4 billion, \$5 billion dollars' worth of money and not have any idea what we're spending it on and just say: the bureaucracy will handle that. I don't understand why we do it so differently. It's not like we're in a minority government situation here. That, of course, may change or could.

In a minority I could understand, you know, if some things happened and it's difficult to keep the calendar steady and every year have the same dates for passing budgets and getting things done, but in a majority government for 40 years you would think that after all those years the government could somehow put a calendar together and have the competence and the wherewithal and the financial management capabilities to put together a calendar where we wouldn't have to approve \$5 billion essentially without even knowing what we're approving it for because we didn't get back here in time to introduce and pass the budget. It really does not make a whole lot of sense.

Any CEO or CFO who took a budget like this to a board of directors would be thrown out on his derrière and told not to come back except to maybe clean out his office or her office. I think that is pretty much exactly what may occur here for a lot of folks if we continue to pass \$5 billion and multibillion dollars in projects and transmission lines, carbon capture and storage to good corporate buddies and so forth, BRIK programs, and all these different things where we just kind of on a whim say: "Here you go. There you go. Have at 'er. Here's \$500 million. Here's \$2 billion. Here's \$300 million. Off we go." Yet that's exactly how we manage the affairs of this province at this time.

Actually, I'll give you a little insight. I don't and I won't and I still will not ever say what an individual member in the caucus over there said in any given caucus meeting, but I will say what was discussed in caucus. I remember in caucus what was discussed about carbon capture and storage, for example. It was actually kind of funny. I remember it was at a Stampede caucus, and we were all sitting around the table, and all of a sudden we were presented with a new program. "This is what we're going to do. We're going to spend \$2 billion on a carbon capture and storage fund, rolling it out over several years. We're going to spend \$2 billion on what we will title a Green TRIP program, which will be grants to municipalities and private corporations that have innovative ideas for mass transportation. The person that will decide what an innovative idea is is the Minister of Transportation," which warms my heart and gives me a huge amount of confidence in that program. That was it.

Then the folks went down and did their press conference, and it was, "Those in favour?" – you know, pound the desk – "Those

opposed? Carried," that sort of thing. That's how \$4 billion of your public money was approved by this government. That's how it went down. It was that quick. Literally, we're talking about a 20-minute conversation here for \$4 billion. That's what we're talking about. This is not a word of a lie, and everyone sitting in this Chamber on that side knows that.

Of course, after the fact, it became a bit of a debate amongst the caucus members about whether that was appropriate or not, but the point is that there wasn't really time for debate. It just happened: \$4 billion out the door, approved, signed, sealed, delivered, done. That is what a government whose spending is completely out of control, who has lost all sense of reality with regard to respect for the public purse and for taxpayers' cash, looks like on the inside. There are many other examples where that has occurred, but that was the most expensive example that I can recall: 20 minutes, \$4 billion, essentially no real discussion, just a bunch of hands pounding on the desks.

That is one of the problems. If you look into the bill and we see some of the amounts here, let's look at Transportation. Transportation: \$151 million in capital investment. That's great; we need transportation. We need roads and infrastructure. But what is that \$151 million being spent on? Is it going to be spent on widening highway 9 to Drumheller? One constituent asked me: "Why are we undertaking this project when we have a \$6.2 billion cash shortfall? Why are we doing that right now? Could that not have waited a couple of years until we were back in surplus? Would the entire economy shut down if we do not widen that road in the next two years?" I don't think it would.

It's not saying that we don't need roads. We like roads. We need roads to put trucks on and transport goods and people to see their families and all those things. We absolutely do need those things. It's so funny over here. You know, everyone talks about: oh, the Liberals and the Wildrose and the New Dems are so different. Indeed, we do have definite policy differences, but for one thing – at least with the Liberals, when I was reading their budget proposal, that was similar to ours – we both understood the need for living within our means and stretching the capital budget over a longer period of time. They proposed five years; we proposed four years. I don't think their five-year idea was that bad. They were saying: look, we need to balance the budget. Good. We say four years. [interjections] Yeah, well, I'll have to think about it a little more.

The point is that when you have a party which is considered – you know, who cares? We're not going to be ideological today. When you have two parties that everyone says are so different from each other saying essentially the exact same thing on fiscal responsibility with regard to the capital budget, you would think that – I don't know – maybe the government would say: "Oh, you know what? Maybe they have a point there. Maybe we can balance our budget, and we can have everything we need and want, but we just can't have it all this year."

3:50

The Education minister has a hard time with this. Whenever we're in estimates, I'm always saying: "We can have it all, Minister. We can have it all. We just can't have it all this year. We've got to therefore decide which projects we can delay an extra year or two and which ones we can't, and there is where we need the list of projects." Then when we get the list of projects, we can sit down and have a debate over which projects, based on objective criteria, are most urgent and which are less urgent. The less urgent ones: perhaps the federal building, equipped with interactive water features, an agrizone, an ecozone, and skating rink, would have

fallen on the last part of the priority list, kind of down the list a little bit, and wouldn't get built.

Then the stuff at the front of the line would include – no doubt about it – schools for Fort McMurray and Beaumont – clearly, Beaumont is in need – for Airdrie and Chestermere. Critically needed schools. They're partitioning classrooms. They're putting two classrooms into a library and shutting the library down in some schools. I've got classes in my constituency of 40 kids in elementary school. There's a priority. Highway 63 to Fort McMurray: a huge priority. We've got to get that finished.

Do we need to be building thousands of new acute-care beds right now? Do we need to be building expensive new hospital infrastructure, that we can't afford to staff, when we could be spending a fraction of that amount on long-term care and assisted living to free up bed blockers in acute care, who are the first ones to tell you they want to get out of there and get into more appropriate housing? That would make some sense. Maybe we could put off some of those new acute-care beds and focus on less expensive long-term beds and actually accomplish the exact same thing we're trying to do, which is increase acute-care capacity without spending all these additional billions of dollars.

Instead, we have a south-side hospital, for example, that is going up. We don't even have the money budgeted to staff it. We don't have a cent budgeted to staff the thing when it opens up, so what are we going to do then? Even if we had the money budgeted, I wonder if we even have the staff necessary in the province to staff that size of a hospital. I mean, everyone likes hospitals, but what good are they if you can't afford to staff them and if you can't find the staff to train because you don't have enough trained staff?

It just is beyond belief, Mr. Speaker, that we can't find a way to prioritize, slow the capital build a little bit, and make sure that we can staff all the facilities that we're planning on opening, that we can staff them appropriately, rather than just build them all. You know, they just kind of sit there empty, or at least a huge percentage of them do, or half empty or a quarter empty or three-quarters empty and so forth. So not a very good bill.

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

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Bill 2 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Bill 2.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly getting the constituency name back as spring progresses. The name "snow bar" is snowbank.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, excuse me.

Has the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill moved the bill? I thought you moved it last time, but if you haven't moved it, then please stand up and move it.

Dr. Brown: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise and move Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011, for third reading.

I do appreciate the discussions we had regarding these matters. If there are other members that wish to speak to that at this time, I'm interested in hearing what they have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as spring progresses, we are getting back to our original constituency name of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It had been changed for obvious reasons this winter to Edmonton-Snowbank. I believe it was the Member for Calgary-Varsity that provided that name to our constituents.

Mr. Hancock: There's been no lack of snow coming from the member.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, there's a little bit there. The hon. member is also in the same snowstorm as I.

Mr. Mason: You're drifting.

Mr. MacDonald: I may be, but I can still see.

Now, Bill 2, Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011, is a very important piece of legislation. We had commented on this earlier. Again, to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, an expression of gratitude for your efforts on this. I certainly hope that this legislation works to reduce family violence by holding accountable those who violate protection orders. This legislative initiative has been called for by many people.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East spoke earlier about the efforts of Jan Reimer, the former mayor of the city of Edmonton, and her work now with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Certainly, Ms Reimer has indicated a number of times that the Council of Women's Shelters has expressed concern about the lack of consequences for those who abuse or breach emergency protection orders. She's hopeful – and so am I – that this legislation will encourage police all over the province to lay criminal charges when people breach protection orders.

Every now and then I think each and every member of this Assembly meets with a constituent who is a victim of family violence and needs a peaceful, secure place to rest with their children while these rather difficult issues are at least stopped and there is a resolution to some of the disputes. Ms Reimer and other individuals from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters see almost daily, unfortunately, first-hand some examples of what this bill is attempting to do, and that is to go after those who are responsible and let them know once and for all that their actions are no longer going to be tolerated.

With those remarks, I would like to be mindful that this certainly is a step in the right direction. The member is making an effort to get tougher on domestic violence. There are different measures that have been discussed in the throne speech. There are different legislative initiatives that are going to proceed through this House in this session. When you look at family violence and how Alberta families are affected by this – I'm not going to get into the comparisons between each and every province or territory, but we have a lot of work to do in this province, and this bill reflects an intention to start. I hope it works.

Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Would you like to close the debate, then, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill?

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a couple of very brief remarks. I want to reiterate my appreciation for the support of 12 different colleagues who spoke to this bill in second reading and in Committee of the Whole and here again in third reading. I want to just briefly address some of the questions that were raised by members of the Assembly during Committee of the Whole.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had asked me about the offences and why the offence and penalty provisions would be better in the act rather than addressing the breaches of protection orders through the Criminal Code. I did address that in part. I mentioned the enhanced tracking that would be available and the fact that all sorts of a grab basket of various offences are brought within the ambit of section 127. A lot of them would be failure to appear in court, failure to produce evidence, all sorts of things which may not be related to family protection orders.

Another direct benefit of having this matter directly in the act rather than having it under a civil process for contempt of court or under the Criminal Code is that by having the enforcement directly under the legislation, it will ensure that the Crown prosecutors are directly involved in all those cases, with better access to information. There will be more consistent application of the penalties, and in many cases the penalties that are provided for under the act will be more severe.

Some members also raised questions about the amount and the appropriateness of the penalties in the bill, that that could be stronger. I would advise the House that the extent and the amount of the penalties proposed were determined in discussions with Justice and Attorney General and a review of other domestic violence legislation right across the country. These measures will be amongst the strongest in the country, and they will send a clear message that a breach of protection order is a serious matter with significant consequences.

There were also some questions about enforcement interprovincially if an abused person were to leave Alberta and the resources for police. Protection orders are entered into the Canadian police information centre's computerized information system, and that does provide all Canadian law enforcement agencies with information on crimes and offenders. I've been advised that the government is working closely with police on how those changes would be implemented, and they also provided input on the penalties and offence provisions in the development phase.

Mr. Speaker, a few members had questions about the support being provided to address family violence. I've already addressed a number of those other issues and measures which are directed towards reducing family violence, including the emergency shelters that I mentioned. I just would like to point out that the funding for emergency shelters for women has increased by 73 per cent. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had raised some concerns about that. It's raised by 73 per cent since 2004-05, from \$15 million to more than \$26 million a year right now. As I discussed during Committee of the Whole, there are other programs in the communities which are doing very good work: domestic violence courts and police teams, safe visitation sites, victims outreach projects, and the family violence info line, which I already mentioned.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the members who have indicated their support for the bill. I ask the Assembly to concur in passing this matter on third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

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

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 3, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2011.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. This is a terrific bill, and I stand to support this bill. We certainly had an opportunity to speak to this at second reading. I'll just be quite brief, Mr. Speaker. The bill would alter the existing terminology in the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act by using the umbrella term "geoscience," which is a commonly accepted term across Canada for various sciences of a geological nature.

Now, certainly, this bill is adding a lot to various statutes and is presented by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I understand you're losing Devon in the next election. I'm sad to hear that.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's efforts. We talked about the importance of these professions, certainly in light of what's going on in Japan, for instance, whether it's the earthquake, the tsunami, or now the engineers who would be trying to control the heat in those reactors. These are very, very important professions. We have to ensure that they are respected and that those who enter the profession and who receive accreditation are protected and that the disciplines that they practise in are protected.

I have to point out that regardless of where you are in the world, there has to be a set of standards, particularly for individuals practising that profession. I'm suspicious of the enforcement of a lot of those standards, hon. member. We have a tendency to shift a lot of engineering work offshore. There are blueprints that are transferred electronically from one jurisdiction to the next and are worked on by qualified engineers, supposedly.

With this legislation I would just, in conclusion, be reminding people in this Assembly that we have to make sure that when we ship this stuff around – and by stuff I mean complete engineering packages – that those that then work on them in a foreign jurisdiction have the same qualifications as the individuals who would practise the engineering professions in this province so that we can ensure that we're just not undermining their professions.

Certainly, the individuals here are well qualified, the training programs at our universities are exceptional, and there is no reason in the world why we should not make a commitment here to enforce those standards.

Thank you.

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

4:10

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated very much the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. They raise for me just a question I'd like to put to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who's bringing the bill forward, whether he can address it now or in his closing remarks or not. In third reading we talk about the impact of the bill. As we change the terminology

around our engineering professions and geology and geophysics professions to geoscience, it does raise the question: what's happening in other jurisdictions?

Here in Alberta we train geologists and geophysicists who go from here to other parts of the world, and we train people who come from other parts of the world to here. If somebody is designated as a geoscientist in Alberta in the future, what, if any, effect does that have if they then proceed to work in Texas or Africa or the Middle East or wherever? Is there any kind of interjurisdictional and international recognition of the term "geoscientist." There may well be, and I suppose I should perhaps know that myself, but I can see that it could cause some confusion.

We know from other professions – physicians, teachers, or others – that if they're coming here from other countries, it can get pretty complicated figuring out if a physician is a physician is a physician, depending on where they're from. I'm just wondering if the term "geoscientist" is gaining global recognition. Are we the first to incorporate that or one of the first? Does anybody anticipate any confusion as this global community of experts moves around from one province to another, one country to another?

Aside from that, Mr. Speaker, I have said earlier all I have to say on this bill, and I think we should move on. Thank you.

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

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, if I could just make a comment, and I made it in my remarks in second reading. With regard to the term "geoscientist" my understanding is that the term in all other provinces of Canada is "geoscientist." I don't know about the rest of the globe, but certainly a lot of Canadian petroleum engineers, geologists, and geophysicists, now geoscientists, do an awful lot of work in the Middle East. There are an awful lot of our personnel there, as has been obvious in the latest strife in Libya, where we have quite a number of Canadian trained people in that field. That's also similar in Saudi Arabia and other countries. That's some clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to speak on the bill now?

Seeing none, on the bill, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Yes. Just one other comment. I should have stood up when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had some concerns with a lot of the work being done offshore. He's certainly correct. There's a lot of the work that is done offshore, but the purpose of professional legislation is that there is a person that must be registered with the Alberta association that takes ultimate responsibility for the work even if some of the work might be done offshore. There is always someone that is registered with the provincial association that takes responsibility for that work. I think that's really the guarantee.

I'd just make another comment. Our professional legislation in Canada is quite unique compared to professional legislation in any other country. We have totally self-regulating professions, and they are involved in the entire process, from the initial registration of the member through to maintaining competency and discipline if necessary. That's not a system that is common in most other countries. I think that if you can reflect on the number of concerns that are expressed with engineers, they're very, very low in Alberta and Canada, and I think that's a tribute to the system that we have in this province and this country.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) anyone?

Seeing none, any other member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, I'll now call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to close debate on Bill 3. I would just offer a brief comment to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that comments made by the Member for St. Albert were the exact comments that I would make, that these changes are consistent right across Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4 Securities Amendment Act, 2011

[Debate adjourned March 16: Mr. Anderson speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to continue the debate.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. How much time do I have? Do you know, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: You have 12 minutes.

Mr. Anderson: Twelve minutes? Okay. I just want to rise and again express support – I forget where I left off last time – for Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011. The reason the Wildrose supports this is because it seeks to improve the passport system, which we think and we believe is a good system. It's a system that has worked very well for our securities regulation. It's been great to have the ability to have a flexible provincial security regulator, that is flexible to our local needs and local economy, specifically trying to raise capital for energy investment, which is a big one. We think that it's very important that we maintain control over that jurisdiction.

I would say, too, as other members have said, that securities regulation, obviously, has always been a provincial jurisdiction. What I'm worried about is that once the federal government inserts itself into an area of provincial jurisdiction, as it often does, it's very difficult to get them out of it. So what is right now a provincial jurisdiction all of a sudden could quickly become a shared jurisdiction. Even though the constitution doesn't say that, that's essentially what might happen.

Again, we've seen this in health care. We've seen this in education. We've seen this a lot in agriculture. We've seen it in a lot of different areas where the federal government feels that they need to come in and, certainly, assist certain areas that are clearly provincial matters instead of what they should be doing, which is transferring tax points to the provinces from the federal government so that they can better raise money for education and health care and all these different things and not have another level of national bureaucracy, even farther removed from the people, to affect issues such as health care, education, the environment, and so forth. There are a lot of them.

4:20

We completely support any move by this government to encourage and promote and strengthen the current passport system and to maintain exclusive jurisdiction over securities regulation. There are many reasons for that, and I hope that people understand why it is so important to maintain this jurisdiction. One of the big reasons is that, you know, once you give up something – say we

did have a national securities regulator; it probably would be based out of, most likely, Toronto. There might be suboffices across the country, but I would assume that the heart of it would be on Bay Street. Once you cede that territory, what would happen inevitably because of their larger population and larger market share and so forth that they would have in securities in the country is that they would start setting the rules, and we wouldn't have much of a say in it.

That could quickly evolve if you get somebody in there who doesn't understand the needs of the various regions and all of a sudden they decide that they're going to start throwing their weight around and making it more difficult to raise capital. Or perhaps they don't regulate it enough and just kind of get lazy and have an anything-goes attitude. It's hard as a province – although we're growing and although our importance is certainly improving in regard to our economy within Canada, we're still not by any stretch the big kids on the block yet. We're getting there, but we're still the fourth-largest province, and Quebec and Ontario and B.C. are bigger. So if they start throwing their weight around in a way that we don't agree with and in a way that we don't want to go along with, it's going to be very hard as part of a national securities regulator to have any real say, and that is not acceptable.

I talked previously about the system being more responsive to regional interests and flexible enough to accommodate the unique needs of our local markets. The good thing about the passport system, though, is that there are a lot of areas in securities regulation where all the provinces, certainly all the major provinces, agree completely on what and how something should be regulated. So we've come together and made this passport system, which provides a single point of access to markets across Canada through a harmonized regulation with the other provinces and their securities regulators.

We feel that this is great. We do not agree with the premise of the federal government – and we're glad to see this provincial government doesn't agree with the premise of the federal government – that a national securities regulator is needed to decrease the costs of raising capital, of doing public offerings and so forth. We don't feel that's the case at all. We feel that the passport system, obviously, can always continue to be improved and updated and more and more streamlined, but it has been very effective. I think, you know, that one of the big misnomers out there, that I heard the current federal Finance minister talk about, was how with the recession and the world economy and everything, the tumult that was going around, we need this new national securities regulator to make things better and to help make it easier and simpler to raise capital in the capital markets here in Canada.

Well, if you look at the meltdown that occurred with regard to the economy with these derivatives and such bogus paper assets that were out there, although Canada was definitely affected, it was affected less than most. We were able to frankly weather the recession better than any other G-8 country and, I would say, probably most industrialized nations if not all industrialized nations. You know, it's the old adage: don't fix what isn't broken. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. This is a classic example. Could it be improved? Could we improve our enforcement? Yeah. Could we improve our policing with regard to fraud and so forth? Yeah, absolutely, we could. But that doesn't mean you rip up the whole system and start from scratch with a huge national regulator down in Ottawa.

In the rankings we see that Canada's regulatory system is consistently ranked as one of the best systems in the world, meaning that the provinces have done their job well in the field of jurisdic

tion. Some organizations, think tanks, and publications have ranked Canada very highly. These are very prestigious and well-respected organizations; for example, the OECD, the World Bank Group, *Euromoney*, and the Milken Institute. These are obviously very influential and well-respected economic organizations and think tanks, and they have clearly said that the way we do raise money in our securities regulation set-up that we have here in Canada is very effective, amongst the most effective in the world. We in the Wildrose concur. There's no reason to fix what's not broken.

You know, it's kind of like the royalty framework, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, isn't it? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. This government did that and cratered the natural gas industry. It's never been the same since. But they have since backtracked to essentially where they were before. They still raised it a bit, but they came back a little bit, and sure enough the money is flowing back. Let's not do the same thing to our securities regulatory framework that this government did in cratering our natural gas producing industry.

I think, in conclusion, that Canada clearly fared better than most countries in the world during this last financial crisis. There was nothing in our securities regulatory framework that in any way harmed us or inhibited us from getting through this last recession. As we go forward, there are no substantive barriers to raising capital in our Canadian capital markets by leaving the current passport system in place. I hope that all members of this House, regardless of what party they belong to, the PCs or the NDP or the Wildrose or the Liberals or the Alberta Party – there's no reason why we should change what is not broken.

I hope that the current finance minister and President of the Treasury Board and the Premier and the new Premier, whoever that is in six months when we decide that we want to have a Premier again, you know, that it is not a lame duck – I hope that those individuals will continue to uphold our provincial jurisdiction on this issue and so forth.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: No. On the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: We have only one minute.

Mr. Hinman: Never enough time when it comes to talking about finances.

It's exciting to be able to talk on Bill 4. It's critical that we continue to protect our jurisdiction when it comes to securities. Bill 4, I feel, is taking a good step forward in protecting our Securities Act.

It's interesting, you know, that in a world of financial disasters right now – and you can look around; it's one country after another – and with the printing of money that's going on, I don't think there's ever been a more important time for us to have a provincial . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) it's now 4:30 and the chair declares that the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. next Monday.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 4th Session (2011)

Activity to March 17, 2011

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Asia Advisory Council Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 132-33 (Mar. 1 aft.), 189-95 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)

2 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011 (Brown)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 133-34 (Mar. 1 aft.), 380-82 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

3 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2011 (Rogers)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 134-35 (Mar. 1 aft.), 313-14 (Mar. 10 aft.), 382-83 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 416 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

4 Securities Amendment Act, 2011 (Brown)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 135 (Mar. 1 aft.), 383-84 (Mar. 15 aft.), 416-17 (Mar. 16 aft.), 440-41 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)

5 Notice to the Attorney General Act (Rogers)

First Reading -- 18-19 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 136 (Mar. 1 aft., adjourned)

6 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2011 (Olson)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 136 (Mar. 1 aft., adjourned)

7 Corrections Amendment Act, 2011 (Oberle)

First Reading -- 73 (Feb. 28 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 137 (Mar. 1 aft., adjourned)

8 Missing Persons Act (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 73 (Feb. 28 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 137 (Mar. 1 aft., adjourned)

9 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 113 (Mar. 1 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 185-86 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 244-47 (Mar. 8 aft.), 254-57 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 305-08 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 14 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 14, 2011; SA 2011 c1]

10 Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011 (\$) (Knight)

First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 1 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-54 (Mar. 8 aft.), 257-58 (Mar. 8 aft., adjourned)

- 11 Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011 (Prins)**
First Reading -- 208 (Mar. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 313 (Mar. 10 aft., adjourned)
- 12 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2011 (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 208 (Mar. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 364-65 (Mar. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 328 (Mar. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 365-67 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 403-08 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 432-38 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
- 14 Wills and Succession Amendment Act, 2011 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 328 (Mar. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 365 (Mar. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011 (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 329 (Mar. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 363-64 (Mar. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Health Insurance Premiums (Health Card Donor Declaration) Amendment Act, 2011 (Sandhu)**
First Reading -- 55 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 73-86 (Feb. 28 aft., passed)
- 202 Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 55 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 209-24 (Mar. 7 aft., defeated on division)
- 203 Alberta Get Outdoors Weekend Act (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 152 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
- 204 Justice System Monitoring Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 304 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
- 205 Municipal Government (Delayed Construction) Amendment Act, 2011 (Taylor)**
First Reading -- 362 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)

Table of Contents

Prayers	419
Introduction of Guests	419
Statement by the Speaker	
Election Anniversaries.....	420
Oral Question Period Rules	421
Members' Statements	
St. Patrick's Day.....	420
Child Poverty.....	420
Monterey Park Telecommunications Tower.....	420
State of the Health Care System.....	421
National Cord Blood Bank	421
Minimum Wage.....	421
Online Parenting Resource	430
Oral Question Period	
Patient Advocacy by Physicians.....	422, 423
Settlement Agreement with Dr. Ciaran McNamee	422
Bruce Power	423
Health Quality Council Review.....	424, 426
Spring Flooding in Southern Alberta.....	424, 427
Heartland Electricity Transmission Line	424, 426
Postsecondary Education for Rural Students.....	425
Arts Funding.....	425
Grain Transportation	427
Penhorwood Apartment Evacuations.....	427
School Bus Strobe Lights	428
Municipal Zoning Exemption for Universities	428
Telecommunications Tower Siting.....	429
Castle Special Management Area	429
Electricity Prices.....	429
Notices of Motions	430
Tabling Returns and Reports	430
Tablings to the Clerk	431
Projected Government Business	431
Orders of the Day	432
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 13 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2011	432
Bill 2 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011.....	438
Bill 3 Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2011	439
Second Reading	
Bill 4 Securities Amendment Act, 2011	440

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