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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, April 21, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. This weekend people from all walks of life and cultures will gather to celebrate Easter. My hope for all this Easter is that you enjoy time with your friends, family, and loved ones, focus on renewal, and look forward to new beginnings. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I rise with great enthusiasm, pleasure, and honour today to introduce the gentleman from Heilongjiang province who provided me with this beautiful silk scarf today and who, along with his delegation, is in your gallery. Mr. Du Jiahao is the executive vice-governor for Heilongjiang province in China, and he is here celebrating 30 years of our relationship with China, 25 years, incidentally, for this capital city. He's joined by Mme Liu from China, who serves as consul general and is seated in Calgary. She is with the delegation today along with the most senior officials from Harbin, Heilongjiang. We had a wonderful opportunity at lunch to exchange information.

One of the wonderful things that this Assembly would be interested in is that thanks to the instruction in curling the Chinese curlers have done very well, and this summer as part of our 30th anniversary celebration we're sending hockey coaches to Harbin, Heilongjiang province, so that they can also learn to play hockey in fine Canadian tradition.

We are honoured to have them here in celebration of the many business, economic, agricultural, and cultural pursuits that we have shared together. Celebrating 30 years, Vice-governor Du is rising, as is Mme Liu and all of the members of the delegation.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from East elementary school, which is located in the city of Leduc in my constituency. They are seated in the members' gallery, and they are accompanied by teacher Mrs. Sonja Hansen and parent helper Ms Juanita Oulton. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my honour on behalf of the Premier to introduce 35 guests from the Fort Saskatchewan Christian school. Their teachers are Josh Gutknecht and Elaine Baillie. Their parent helpers are Kerri Wiens, Tanner Maschmeyer, René Goodbrand, Wendy Hagstrum, Darren MacLennan, Kelly Fermaniuk, and Niki Blanchard. I would ask them to all rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce a group of 28 visitors from Madonna Catholic school. Along with teacher Ray Rudanec we have parent helpers Tracy Szymanski, Shannon Rudanec, Amanda Rudanec, Lorraine Lydom – I'm hoping that I haven't mispronounced those too badly – and the brightest kids you can imagine from Madonna Catholic school. Would they please rise, and could we salute their attendance here today?

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a great Albertan. After working in the private sector and 23 years of exceptional service with the government of Alberta, most recently as my assistant deputy minister, Robin Wigston is retiring effective this July 31. In his work with colleagues across government departments and with his calm demeanour and his we-can attitude Robin has done what we all strive to do, make a difference. I can tell you that he has not just made a difference in the housing department; he has also made a difference, I understand, on the rodeo circuit in his past. A great deal of his dedicated service with the government of Alberta focused on housing and assisting the most vulnerable Albertans as well as giving the best value for the taxpayer. Mr. Speaker, these sentiments have been echoed to me by the Minister of Infrastructure and the minister of children's services, who I've spoken with over the last little while. Robin, I've learned a lot from you, and I'm going to miss you. Please join me, all members, in congratulating Robin for his 23 years of exemplary service to this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's always a special day when one has constituents come for a visit. I'm wanting to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today four of my constituents who live in Wetaskiwin. They are Marcia Schultz and her children: Lois, age 10; Eric, age 12; and Wilson, age 14. Marcia home-schools her children, and obviously she's doing a good job today. They're on a field trip here to see how the Legislature works. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and that my colleagues here give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine who's visiting the Legislature today. We have with us Danielle Klooster, who is seated in the visitors' gallery. Danielle's experience in community development, board governance, and business drew her to a position with the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce as manager of policy, advocacy, and communication. She also serves as a councillor in the town of Penhold in my riding, sits on the board of the Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society, and is an organizer in the women in politics initiative. Danielle is very passionate about everything she does, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four individuals up in the members' gallery. One of them is my staff member, Mrs. Camille Hauck. Please stand, Camille. She is an assistant in my office, a wonderful lady who does some very good work for me, and I thank her every day for the work that she does do. She's here today with her son, actually, Curtis Hauck and two of his grade 7 classmates from the Madonna Catholic school, Mr. Ben Schmidt and David Hollik, if they could rise, too. These three young men missed out on the trip last year as a grade 6 class, so they're in grade 7, and they're here today. I would just ask that they stand—they are—and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions. First of all, the Minister of Justice had the opportunity to introduce the Schultzes. I have the introduction of their grandparents here, Cliff and Shirley Breikreuz, who are no strangers to you. Cliff and Shirley are great community members in the Onoway area. Shirley is a very active member of the Onoway public library system. Cliff, as you know, is my previous MP, and he's one of the two Senators-in-waiting here in Alberta. I'd ask them both to stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce you to a young lady that I've known for over 50 years. She brings a smile to my face every day and she has for 50 years. It's my little baby sister Pat, and she's also here with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. She's a chamber manager in Whitecourt. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly six trustees from the Sturgeon school division who are here today. It's been a pleasure to work with these folks over the last three years and even the decade before that as their Xerox sales rep for many years. I know they work very hard to do an excellent job for the students in our area in making sure they have one of the best educations in the world. I'd ask them to please rise one-by-one as I call their names. They are trustees Liz Kohle, Shelley Porter, Brent Gray, Daryl Krieger, Wendy Miller, and Vice-chair Tracy Nowak. I would invite the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Project Adult Literacy Society

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today our world thinks big. We live in an age when every bit of information is valuable and is a basis for the decisions that we make. We do all this because we can read. Imagine how you would feel if this information, literacy or numeracy, was foreign to you or if you didn't know how many nickels were in a dollar or what a law was.

Mr. Speaker, I attended the graduation of Project Adult Literacy Society of Edmonton on Tuesday. These brave people are not concerned with deficits or infrastructure or some obscure ideological argument. They are doing something much more important. They are learning to read. Marty Chan, writer-in-residence of the

Edmonton public library, summed it up best by saying: learning to read opened the doors to the things that were a lot more interesting than my own life. It opened the door to knowledge, and knowledge is power.

PALS gets some public support, and I would guess that they turn every dollar into value 10-fold. Mr. Speaker, PALS has 76 tutors and 36 volunteers who logged 8,876 hours last year helping adults learn to read, write, and count.

Consider the proclamation of Tom Joad in John Ford's movie, *The Grapes of Wrath*: there was a time when a man didn't need book learnin'; all he needed was some cipherin' to get a fair deal in the market, but I guess those times, like a lot of other things, is gone.

Mr. Speaker, PAL students are typically between the age of 35 and 55. These people should be in the peak earning years of their lives, but for most of them these years equate to menial jobs and minimum wages if they work at all. It's a wonderful thing to listen to someone give a speech they've written by themselves for the very first time. I had this chance the other night, Mr. Speaker, and it might have been the most beautiful oratory I have ever heard.

At PALS progress means being a little smarter tomorrow than you were today. We know that there are 20 nickels in a dollar, 26 letters in the alphabet, and 13 doughnuts in a baker's dozen, and thanks to everyone at PALS the students will all know the same.

Thank you.

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

Quality, Affordable Child Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than half a million Albertans are children who are 12 and under. Approximately 60 per cent of our children in Alberta have a mother in the paid labour force, and more than 10 per cent come from lone-parent families. Affordable, accessible, quality daycare can really pull a community together and offer great supports for children and their families. Parents make connections, staff support early childhood education opportunities, and children develop interpersonal skills.

These opportunities have a special value for new immigrants when children develop language and literacy skills, making the transition to school easier. We've seen study after study that show that quality child care has high economic and social returns to society and to taxpayers. These studies demonstrate how a \$1 investment in universal child care offers returns of \$2 to \$17 in the long term.

Eleven per cent of our children are living below the low-income cutoff. We know that quality, affordable child care can result in greater health and educational outcomes, and it can help break the cycle of child poverty. But even with subsidies many low-income families can't afford child care. There are also families where both parents want to work, but the high fees for two or more children make it economically impossible for both parents to work outside the home.

Alberta, our richest province, only funds child care at one-third the national average. This low level of funding drives costs up for parents. Even if we aren't willing to fund child care at the gold star level of Quebec, where daycare is only \$6 per day, by spending to the national average Manitoba is able to cap their fees at \$26 per day.

Approximately half of the child care spaces we have in this province are profit driven. It's very difficult for nonprofit societies to open child care centres. We need to find ways to provide stable funding for community-centred, nonprofit providers.

People who work with our children are doing important, life-changing work; however, they are often paid low wages, resulting

in high staff turnover. It is time for our province to step up and put the public good first. We need to invest in a quality child care system instead of placing the burden on families.

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

Earth Day

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in recognition of Earth Day, which is celebrated each year on April 22. The first Earth Day was a modest teaching forum held in the United States in 1970. A year later Alberta created the first provincial Environment ministry in Canada. In fact, Alberta Environment celebrates its 40th anniversary this month. A great deal has changed over those four decades. When the first Earth Day was held, most people had never considered recycling paper, glass, or metal. Cars still used leaded gas, and the idea of measuring an individual's carbon footprint would have sounded like something from a science fiction story.

Just as Earth Day has grown into an international event, this government has expanded its scope to protect our air, water, land, and biodiversity in ways we couldn't have imagined in 1971. Over the past four decades Alberta has developed comprehensive strategies to reduce its environmental footprint and energy consumption, implemented innovative waste management strategies, worked with industry to reduce greenhouse gases, and invested in clean energy technology. These are just a few examples of what our government is doing to maintain a healthy balance between the environment, the economy, and responsible resource development.

Just as importantly, individuals are recycling, composting, making their homes more energy efficient, and making greener choices in their daily lives. All Albertans can take pride in what we have achieved together. Earth Day is a time to reaffirm our commitment to doing the right thing for our environment.

I ask each member of this House to join me in recognizing April 22 as Earth Day and to keep working to protect our air, water, and land for this and future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Land Stewardship Legislation

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In spite of what critics may claim, this is an exciting and good time for landowners in Alberta as the main guiding principle of the land-use framework is and always will be respect for private property. This is important because I am a landowner just like my children, friends, neighbours, and colleagues.

Bill 10 continues to protect landowners' existing rights to compensation. If the landowner and the government cannot agree on a compensation amount, either side can appeal the matter to either the compensation board or the courts. In other words, if a landowner is not happy about the proposed compensation, he or she can appeal it.

The amendments in Bill 10 do not create new compensations. This needs to be clear. However, they do create a new process to apply for compensation if after the planning process a landowner believes they are entitled to compensation as a result of a regional plan. The new process would follow existing law regarding whether compensation should be awarded and how much.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, I want to protect the land rights that belong to my family, friends, and all Albertans. This is why I

support Bill 10 as it ensures that landowners' existing rights to compensation remain in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, each of us in this room has a story told by our families and by our histories. These histories shape who we are, and that is why we remember. Each year on the last Saturday of November I along with my family and many Albertans of Ukrainian heritage remember the millions of victims of Ukrainian famine on Holodomor Memorial Day.

Mr. Speaker, every year on April 24 Armenians around the world pause to remember another cruel massacre, the Armenian genocide, on a day known as Armenian martyrs' day. They pause to remember their families, their histories. Many Armenians live in Alberta today, some of them children or grandchildren of survivors of this genocide, including our friend the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

On this day people remember 1 and a half million Armenians who marched to their deaths in the final days of the Ottoman Empire 96 years ago. It is a day on which to pause, to remember, and to learn from the atrocities of the past, just as we do with Holodomor, to ensure that the memories of those departed remind us to never again repeat the grave mistakes of the past. We are inspired by the spirit, the strength, and the determination of the Armenian people, who have risen up to help build the world we live in today, showing courage that is an everlasting triumph over those who sought to destroy them.

On Sunday as we celebrate Easter with our families, I urge all of us to remember the tragedy of 1915 and in each day forward to promote the acceptance of all peoples and all cultures, opposing crimes against humanity regardless of where they occur and against whom they are carried out. With our thoughts and with our actions we show that we will remember.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Dr. David Candler, a family doctor from Edmonton, is the latest victim of this government's culture of fear and intimidation. Although Dr. Candler was commended by many patients as the best doctor they ever had, he was summarily fired by Capital health region after reporting a disability and illness to the health region. Dr. Candler says that he was, quote, terminated by Capital health without just cause, end quote. His case is also set to be heard by the Alberta Human Rights Commission April 26. To the minister: how can the minister say with any credibility that doctors are free to come forward to tell their stories? As Dr. Candler has said, he came forward to advise . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, all doctors are welcome to approach the Health Quality Council, where other doctors, colleagues of theirs, will hear their concerns. They'll be able to talk in their own language.

My understanding of the situation that has just been raised is that this goes back to 2005 and that that particular doctor did raise

something with the Human Rights Commission and probably would like it to be heard in that venue. It's one of many different vehicles available to people, including . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, given that a public inquiry is the only way to get to the bottom of this government's culture of fear and intimidation, will this government finally concede that the Health Quality Council review will not help doctors such as Dr. Candler?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would contend that the Health Quality Council review will help doctors, and it will help others who wish to come forward. I think it might even help this hon. member because there is a misunderstanding here of the depths to which the Health Quality Council may wish to probe.

Finally, I just wonder if this hon. member has the permission of Dr. Candler to be raising these issues. I'd like him to tell me that.

Dr. Swann: How many more hundreds or thousands of health professionals like Dr. Candler does the minister have to hear from before he concedes that a public inquiry is the only way to address this government's culture of fear and intimidation among health professionals and patients?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's not the government who is creating any fear among the population. It's not the government who is intimidating anyone. What it is is false allegations that are being raised. It's accusations against innocent people who can't defend themselves. That's what is attacking the public confidence in the system. Why don't we just allow the Health Quality Council to proceed with its review? We'll see where it's going in three months' time, in six months, and a final report will be made public in nine months.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a patient ignores the advice of their doctor, the condition often goes from bad to worse. Since this government is ignoring 6,500 doctors who are calling for a full public inquiry, the government's position has now deteriorated as 21,000 health services professionals with the Health Sciences Association of Alberta have joined the call for a public inquiry. To the minister. The HSAA has said, "Heavy-handed tactics continue to put a chill on patient advocacy." When will the minister do the right thing for patients and call for a public inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with where the hon. member is coming from, but I do understand that the Health Sciences Association contract just expired at the end of March. I think they're stepping into the next phase to renew that contract, and I wish them well with that. I can't comment.

What I can tell you is that people who are members of health sciences are increasing in our province, so clearly there must be a lot of good things happening here to keep attracting more members into that group.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister isn't listening to the 27,000 health care workers who want to see a public inquiry, who is he listening to?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to listen to everyone, actually. It's part of my job to listen. It's also part of my job to

take action, and that action has resulted in some very good things. We have more international medical graduates, in fact, 400 more today than we had three years ago. We have – I think I mentioned this yesterday – 14 more oncologists than a few years ago. We have 23 more cardiologists than a few years ago, and we have over 3,000 more registered nurses. We have over 100 more nurse practitioners. Fabulous news for the health system in this province, and that's the kind of news Albertans also want to hear.

Dr. Swann: Given that technicians, occupational therapists, pharmacists, psychologists, and social workers, the backbone of our health care system, are calling for a public inquiry, when is this minister going to find his and call a public inquiry?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times this member has to hear it to understand that we have a full, independent review going on in this province, led by the most credible people available under the circumstances. They are going to get to the bottom of a lot of these kinds of accusations, these kinds of allegations, and they will get the truth out, never mind false allegations without any evidence or any proof. Let them come forward. They're talking doctor to doctor where necessary and lawyer to lawyer where also necessary.

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

Standards for Underage Workers

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New research offers some startling figures. Nineteen per cent of 12- to 14-year-olds are employed, 21 per cent of whom are in prohibited occupations. Six per cent of nine- to 11-year-olds are employed, 78 per cent of them in prohibited occupations. No, this is not Dickensian England but Alberta today. To the minister of employment. I would like to ask on behalf of the Albertans who will be shocked by this report. Does the minister believe that Alberta's Employment Standards Code has kept pace with community values?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Albertans will be shocked because what this report, that has been commissioned by the AFL, is suggesting is that there are 126,000 parents who allow their kids to be exploited, that there are 126,000 businesses in Alberta that exploit children, and that all of us, including you, Mr. Speaker, purchase products from businesses that exploit little children in Alberta. Humbug. They should be ashamed of themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. minister should not bring the chair into the debate. The chair would never ever do what the minister said he would do.

The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A sad case of transference.

Enforcement of Alberta's Employment Standards Code is complaint driven: no complaint, no problem. Isn't it time for the minister to commit to proactive inspections of premises where children are employed in prohibited occupations?

The Speaker: With care, Minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let's not skirt the issue. What the report is suggesting and what AFL has publicized on their website is that they're telling us that there are 126,000 children in this province working illegally, being exploited as labourers. Alberta has just cosigned an international agreement from Geneva, where

we are eradicating forced child labour throughout the world. To suggest that we're doing that in Alberta is reprehensible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has sat for over seven months on Alberta's two-bit minimum wage increase, when can we expect the minister of child labour to act on this Alberta child exploitation information?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this question doesn't warrant a response. This member should stand up and apologize to all parents in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before we go on, the minister will stand up and withdraw his accusation made at the chair.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I withdraw.

The Speaker: With conviction, I hope.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: All right. Mr. Speaker, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, representing 21,000 health care support workers, has now joined the AMA and virtually every Albertan in what is now a deafening call for a public inquiry into the intimidation and punishment of front-line health care workers by this government. All are demanding the inquiry have the power to subpoena witnesses and compel evidence in order to determine who was involved, who has been victimized, and how we stop it. To the health minister: why won't he agree to call a public inquiry on what may be the biggest ethical scandal in our province's history? What are you hiding from?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any scandal whatsoever. I think what there is is some great stability in the system now, with the best potential for future predictability that we've seen in the history of this province and anywhere else in Canada. We've made a firm commitment to our five-year health action plan. That's the contemporary position. If there were issues of the past, there are mechanisms for those to be dealt with, and my understanding is that they are.

Mr. Anderson: Given that that answer is completely separate and apart from reality, why do you continue to ignore and dismiss Alberta's doctors, nurses, and other health professionals who want a full public inquiry by belittling doctors who do speak out as liars and while hiding behind a Health Quality Council that reports to you, is paid by your ministry, and that, clearly, does not have the power or capability to subpoena witnesses or compel evidence? What are you hiding from, sir? Why won't you just call the inquiry?

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Clearly, the fact that more doctors are coming forward and airing their concerns that go back five, 10, 15, maybe even 20 years ago, is evidence that the process that's been put in place is working. I'll tell you that if the hon. members of the opposition would just allow that process to conclude, at least to get more firmly started, which it has already, they might be surprised by what the findings are. Who knows where it will go?

Mr. Anderson: Well, to the health minister, then. Given the fact that you were during this time, during this scandal, the junior

health minister in question and given that this constitutes an obvious conflict of interest as you may well have been involved in or had knowledge of this scandal and given that the Health Quality Council reports to you and given that your ministry pays the salaries of that Health Quality Council, which is another conflict of interest, will you please, Minister, step down until the air can be cleared around this matter? Right now the people of Alberta don't have . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, given that this member doesn't know what he's talking about and given that this member is wrong on all counts and given that he is proceeding on some wrong and false information, I would ask him to probably withdraw that question because it does not dignify an answer.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans face a massive hike in electricity rates according to research done by the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association, representing a majority of industrial users of power in this province. These large increases are caused by this PC government's insistence on building billions of dollars of unnecessary transmission infrastructure. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is this minister working so diligently to make Alberta business uncompetitive?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I'd like to start out by saying that this is just another example of this member's attempts to put fear and intimidation into Albertans. I happened to see his news release, and if there was ever a news release that was issued with so many inaccuracies in it, I have never seen it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the Alberta competitiveness impact from transmission costs contained in this report by some of the biggest users of electricity in this province, that spend billions of dollars on power, how can this minister stand there and say that it's inaccurate or incomplete when he himself will never answer a question straight in the first place?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, if this member would look at *Hansard*, I didn't say that what was in that particular presentation was inaccurate because, in fact, I have sat down with the same group. This is nothing new, what the member is allegedly releasing today. I've had those meetings on several occasions. I don't happen to agree with the numbers that are in that presentation. What I did say was inaccurate were the member's accusations in his news release.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister should actually be responding to the question, which was about competitiveness impact that was given to the Whitecourt & District Chamber of Commerce by the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association, and they say that they are going to be made uncompetitive by this government's misguided attempts to build massive infrastructure that is not needed, why won't the minister come clean with Albertans and admit that he's just going to drive Alberta business into the ground?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you one way to make Alberta business uncompetitive, and that's to have those guys try to run a government in this province.

What we are doing is ensuring that we have the transmission in place that will guarantee that Alberta business will be competitive in the long term.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A budget nightmare, said one Calgary paper. Layoffs in Lethbridge. Tough times ahead, says the *Vauxhall Advance*. It's déjà vu all over again, and what advice does the minister give boards in response to his grand cutting? He says: use reserves to pay teachers and support staff. Then next year when the reserve funds are depleted across the province, what does the minister expect school boards to do to make up for their long-term shortfalls?

The Speaker: Well, that's quite speculative, but go forward.

Mr. Hancock: It is, indeed, Mr. Speaker, quite speculative.

In fact, because of the impact of the fiscal strategies and the planning of this government this province is going to be leading this North American continent out of the recession. The prospects are already good. We're hearing about shortages of workers already. So next year is going to be a much better year. But it's always prudent for school boards and anyone else who is managing public money to be looking at what they're doing to determine whether we're getting value for it, and there's no better time to do it than when fiscal times are tight.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that the minister just basically admitted that we're heading into better economic times and our population will continue to grow, why are you cutting school boards' budgets and letting teachers go when we should actually be hiring them in this time?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, apart from one or two, well, maybe 10 boards in the province most school boards' budgets actually didn't get cut. They went up. As the hon. member will know because he was here to vote on it yesterday and to speak on it in Committee of Supply on Tuesday, the budget for Education actually went up 4.7 per cent. Now, costs have also gone up. Times are tight. Fiscal restraint is necessary, and tough decisions are there. That's why we get elected. It's not to make the easy choices. It's to be there with intelligence, making prudent decisions over the long term when times are tough.

Mr. Hehr: Given that the minister is playing with numbers and he knows full well he's shortchanging school boards, will the minister do the right thing, restore his cuts, so that teachers can be hired, staff can be hired, and kids can get educated properly in this province?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one thing I know is that the children of this province get one of the best opportunities in the world to get a good education. Is it perfect? No. Are there things we need to do to make sure that we can continue to say that five years, 10 years, and 15 years from now? Absolutely. We have excellent teachers, we have an excellent system, and most children most of the time get a very good opportunity. We're working on the rest to make sure that everybody has a good opportunity all the time.

The fact that we're in a tough fiscal period and some tough choices have to be made and people have to look at what they're spending money on to make sure that we're getting value for money is not a bad thing, Mr. Speaker. It's what governments need to do all the time if they want to be fiscally prudent.

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

GreenTRIP Incentives Program

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. GreenTRIP is a \$2 billion commitment to improve and expand local, regional, and intermunicipal public transit in our province. My question to the Minister of Transportation: what projects have been announced under GreenTRIP so far?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's good to have a good positive question and a good positive answer for a good MLA for a change. I want to say that the first two GreenTRIP projects were announced this month. One is the Edmonton LRT NAIT extension, and it will receive nearly half a billion dollars. This will allow the city to extend the existing LRT line from downtown to MacEwan University and then on to the NAIT campus. Yesterday we had a \$13.6 million announcement for the new Strathcona park-and-ride terminal to be built in Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. The Strathcona park-and-ride terminal will be in my colleague's constituency of Sherwood Park, but I know that many of my constituents will also use this new facility. What can the minister tell us about the project? Why does he think this is a good investment of GreenTRIP dollars?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the project is being done by the county of Strathcona. The project involves a new integrated bus terminal and a park-and-ride lot. It will have a large passenger waiting area, more than 1,200 parking stalls, and a passenger pick-up and drop-off. This project will benefit the county and all the surrounding communities. It'll be easier for many more residents to use public transit, get their cars off the road, and it will help promote these communities as a vibrant place to live. That's exactly what GreenTRIP is all about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear about these projects, but it does seem like we've been waiting a long time for this funding to actually get out the door. So my question to the Minister of Transportation: when are we going to start seeing more applications being approved?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, GreenTRIP is a significant investment in public transit and a key part of building a world-class transportation system in Alberta. My officials are currently reviewing the applications that have been submitted by various municipalities. They set local priorities and make the decisions on how they want to apply for GreenTRIP funding. These can be very complex, and we must exercise due diligence.

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

2:10

Water Research

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has now given power over water research to the ener-

gy sector, ever-increasing the politicization of research. Alberta will now have water monitoring and water research funneled through the lens of the energy industry. Now, we don't allow Olympic athletes to control their own drug-testing process to protect them and the process. The same due diligence and protection should function here. To the Minister of Environment: how is it not a conflict of interest to have a significant consumer of water be given control over what research and how the research is done?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, were it to be true, it would be problematic, but it is not true. What we're doing throughout government is co-ordinating various and sundry research that was occurring in numerous departments, be they environment or agriculture or any of the other research facilities throughout the province, and co-ordinating them all under one ministry, Advanced Education and Technology. It is Advanced Education and Technology, not industry, that will be responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: can the minister explain how the decision was reached to move water research, the most urgent environmental issue in Alberta, to a board with some of the biggest names in the energy industry? Former Syncrude and Nexen CEOs; former senior VP for PetroCan; senior director for Agrium; senior VP, Capital Power: the list goes on and on and on.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to respond to this. Water research is critically important in the province of Alberta, and it is not being handled by the energy industry. That board of directors is truly a remarkable group of people. It is responsible for research in energy and the environment, but water for life and water is through all of our ministry, through all of Alberta Innovates. In fact, the University of Alberta has up to 200 people involved in water research. The University of Lethbridge has a whole water research and environmental centre that works on water research. We cover water research throughout the ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you again. Back to the Minister of Energy: when having the energy industry monitoring the environment in Alberta was such a colossal failure, what makes the minister think that having the energy industry controlling environmental research will be such a success?

Mr. Liepert: I have no idea what the member is alluding to because I think what the Minister of Environment just finished telling her is that her facts are all incorrect, Mr. Speaker.

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

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are incredibly concerned about the culture of the WCB. They feel that WCB workers approach injured workers with a preconceived notion of mistrust. My questions are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Minister, what are you doing to change this culture of the front-line workers in WCB?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we have to give credit where credit is due. WCB actually does a fine job with the

majority of claims that are processed through the Workers' Compensation Board, not to say that there isn't a percentage of claims that leave workers dissatisfied, whether legitimately or not. I can tell you that there is a process for appeal, on which I'm working right now to make sure that it's shortened and more accessible to workers, and that will assist them in resolving some of those problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is it true that injured workers are told that if they use WCB doctors, they're able to get scans, MRIs, or other tests done sooner than if using one's own family doctor? Why are people encouraged not to use their own family doctors?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. There are no such things as WCB or non-WCB doctors. Injured workers utilize regular Alberta doctors. However, when a claim is approved and it's a work-related accident, these doctors bill WCB for their services as opposed to our public health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are doctors or other health care professionals compensated by WCB for working on WCB files beyond the usual compensation that health care professionals receive under the fee-for-service payment model?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, WCB has payment arrangements with doctors. Let's face it. All doctors in Alberta are private corporations, and they bill either Alberta Health Services or WCB. They have an agreed schedule of payments with WCB. I'm not sure whether it exceeds Alberta Health Services' on some procedures or not, but it's a payment schedule that's agreed to between the doctors and WCB.

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

Land Stewardship Legislation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many people, including those who believe strongly in vigorous environmental protection, are concerned that proposals in Bill 10 are modelled after the American-style property rights legislation, and they've asked me to put questions to the Minister of SRD. To the minister: will the Land Stewardship Act combined with the proposals in Bill 10 have the effect of freezing planning for environmental protection?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the regional plans that will be spawned from that legislation and supported by that legislation will do anything but. What will happen is that there will be a very solid and robust opportunity for conservation and environmental protection in that legislation and through the plans that it supports.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: what actions has the government taken to ensure that land-use planners can do their work without fear of lawsuits?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the business about land-use planning is a municipal issue. In the legislation and, most

importantly I think, in some of the subsequent amendments that may come forward with respect to that legislation, we've made it very clear that municipal governments have that authority and will continue to exercise that authority for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: what reassurance can the minister offer those who fear that these changes will elevate property rights over environmental protection?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the situation that we have here I think is a very good balance. In fact, the entrenchment of property rights in the province of Alberta has been here since Alberta was a province, and this continues, I think, that very good, solid tradition. However, there are opportunities here where we can work with individual private property owners and, of course, people that lease public land from the province of Alberta for better environmental stewardship and better outcomes from the point of view of our ecological heritage in the province.

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

Continuing Care Strategy

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This year the first wave of baby boomers are becoming seniors, and our seniors' population is expected to grow significantly over the decade. The aging of our population is providing a new set of opportunities and challenges for all stakeholders specific to affordable accommodations. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is the government doing to meet the need for more affordable supportive living accommodations?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with our partners to significantly increase the supply of affordable supportive living accommodations in the province. The continuing care strategy, aging in the right place, is one way we are assisting in the development of projects as a community of care concept. That involves independent living, supportive living, and long-term care spaces. Ninety per cent of all seniors stay in their own homes, so one of the parts of the continuing care strategy that is very important is home care, which is delivered by Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: given that the seniors' population is expected to exceed 500,000 by 2016, what is the government doing to meet that increased need for affordable supportive living accommodations?

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, Mr. Speaker, this year alone we're spending \$75 million to help build new affordable supportive living spaces. The request for proposals for that \$75 million for ASLI spaces will come out in the next few months. This government has a long-term commitment to our seniors. We've spent over half a billion dollars to provide 10,000 spaces. We've built 6,000 of those, and 4,000 are on the way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what impact is the continuing care strategy having on seniors and persons with disabilities?

2:20

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the continuing care strategy is about increasing the quality of life for seniors today and tomorrow. It's about providing options for our seniors to keep couples together, to keep them close to family and friends in the communities that they helped to build. A key component of the strategy assists developers in providing affordable supportive living spaces for persons with disabilities like the innovative Balwin Villa project in Edmonton. Balwin Villa provides quality accommodations for over 100 brain-injured and dementia clients.

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

Standards for Underage Workers (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recently released study shows that 8,200 Alberta children ages 9 to 11 are working in our province and that an unacceptable 78 per cent of them are working illegally in fields such as janitorial services. Meanwhile prosecution of this practice is virtually nonexistent. Based on previous exchanges, it appears as though the minister is content to blame parents. Will the Minister of Employment and Immigration acknowledge that it is his government's neglect and disinterest in regulating child employment that has facilitated this practice of child labour and admit that the Tory government is simply not interested in protecting Alberta's children from exploitation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what the member is telling us and what the report says is that in Alberta right now there are 126,000 children exploited, working in our businesses. Their parents obviously consent to it, this government obviously consents to it – not you, Mr. Speaker – and all of us are somehow patronizing these businesses. How can that be possible? What I would like to know is that if they have any examples of child labour exploitation, give us the examples.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the study shows that half the children working in restaurants interviewed in the study reported multiple violations of their rights and given that the NDP warned this government that this would happen when the government decided to allow 12-year-olds to work in restaurants, will the minister admit that these numbers show that the Tories were wrong, that we were right, and that this government's lax laws have exposed school-age children to exploitation and unsafe work environments?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, if this particular member is aware of any instance where in this province a child is being exploited, it is not only her legal duty but her moral duty to report it to this minister. Every single complaint is investigated. Somehow I don't hear complaints from parents, from Albertans, or from children that there is exploitation of children.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister appears interested in having me do his job for him, will he do the following? If this minister finds that this report is approved by peer review, will he agree to resign given this kind of exploitation on his watch?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I suspect they're going to call for a public inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, this minister is committed to making sure that employment standards are being adhered to. As a matter of fact,

we have an educational program right now known as Tell Your Boss Where To Go for employment standards information. Every single complaint is investigated. If this member has a complaint, please let me know because I will be the first one to make sure that no child is exploited in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Residential Building Inspections

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been reported that the province's chief building inspection administrator has undertaken a review of all the engineering reports about the Penhorwood condominium catastrophe in Fort McMurray. The minister has indicated that the results of the review will not be made public. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: if he is confident that Alberta's building inspection system is working properly, why won't he publicly release the findings of the review or at least to the people who were directly affected by this catastrophic incident?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for asking the question. There's no doubt that we do this to make sure that the safety codes are still working, that our buildings are built according to standards. There's no doubt that he's accumulating all of those particular reports and will do an analysis and then report to me to see if there are necessary changes to the codes that are required. If he does identify changes that are required, then we will deal with the broader public on the basis of those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Given that the condominium development appears to have passed inspections under the Alberta building code and all other applicable laws and turns out to have major structural problems, as in Fort McMurray, doesn't this suggest that Alberta's minimum building and safety codes may be inadequate?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I won't speculate in terms of what reasons, why we're having problems with the apartments in Fort McMurray, and there's no doubt there are quite a number of individuals that have been named in a lawsuit. A lot of that information will follow. I'm not in a position to decide who may be responsible for this or not responsible.

Ms Pastoor: As you've mentioned, given that the Penhorwood condominium board has launched a class-action lawsuit, how quickly could the minister act on any recommendations issued by the judge if problems are identified within Alberta's building development system?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by indicating that Alberta has one of the strongest safety codes in all of Canada, and we're very, very proud of our safety codes and the inspection process. But if there are recommendations that come out of the inquiry, then we'll certainly look at them very, very quickly. We constantly review the codes, or the act, to make sure that they respond to the needs of Albertans. If there's a need to change them, we will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

ILO Agreement on Forced Labour

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most nations have ratified the International Labour Organization's convention 29, regarding forced labour. Canada, however, is one of the few that has not. My question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is Alberta doing to support the movement to eliminate forced labour?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, in Canada in our federal system in order for a federal government to enter into an international convention: all provinces must first endorse the convention. Alberta has proudly endorsed the convention, and I imagine that very shortly, before the end of this year, our federal government will be signing off ratifying convention 29 on forced labour.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, again to the same minister: given that the ILO convention 29 deals with compulsory labour, does Alberta's prisoner worker program or our emergency measures legislation contravene this international agreement?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, no, it will not. That was a matter that was looked into very carefully. Prisoners in Canada and Alberta are not being outsourced for the benefit of private businesses. As such, their employment within the capacity of programs or within the facility is not in any violation of this ILO convention.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, again to the same minister: are there any long-term implications or benefits of Alberta's endorsement of this ILO convention?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. Number one, it shows that we are proud to showcase our employment standards and that they live up to international standards. What we will have to do as a result of this is file amendments to our employment standards with this international body just to maintain our commitment to maintain and exceed international standards and employment standards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals (continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend I was in a coffee shop talking with citizens, and they asked me to ask a question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The question was simply this. Why does the Minister of Health and Wellness refuse to answer questions in a straightforward way? In fact, they said that he can simply talk the leg off a chair without answering a question. Will he please agree to answer the question that I'm going to ask him in my second question this afternoon?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one thing I've always appreciated about this member is his sense of humour, so bring it on.

Mr. Boutilier: Given that he, I think, said yes to the question, my question. The folks in my coffee shop have said that he was the junior minister. He was potentially in a conflict of interest. Why is

he refusing or why doesn't he have the guts to do the right thing and call a public inquiry? The question is: why?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated on numerous occasions why, and I won't take up the House repeating all of that unless you give me unanimous consent to speak all afternoon, in which case I'd be happy to read out all the reasons why.

However, what I'd like to clarify is that while I was the associate minister of health, I was responsible for the wellness side. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I dedicated most of my effort to persons with developmental disabilities, and that crystallized in the form of a report called Building Better Bridges. I can tell you that during my time and for the time after the lives of those individuals improved quite enormously, and I have a letter to prove it.

2:30

Mr. Boutilier: Given that non-answer, Mr. Speaker, will the hon. minister do the right thing and have the guts to step down and allow someone else with the guts to call a public inquiry to get to the bottom of this cloud, lost confidence in this minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any confidence lost whatsoever. I think that what you see is a lot of new approaches being taken as a result of the five-year health action plan. I think you see a lot of co-operation. We have more meetings going on now with all the health professionals, and we're about to embark on a very, very important primary care initiative, as set out in the agreement in principle with the Alberta Medical Association and their doctors, to ensure that the services continue to improve for those seeking them in this province.

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

Curbside Recycling

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many government policies and programs are aimed at addressing important societal issues. However, there are some unintended consequences arising from these well-intentioned programs. Calgary's curbside recycling program is one of these well-intentioned programs that has had some unintended consequences. My questions are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Considering the minister's commitment last fall to crack down on panhandling, typically concentrated in the downtown core, is the minister committed to doing the same for bottle-pickers who have migrated into inner-city residential communities as a result of the curbside recycling program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member asks an important question. I do agree with him that panhandling can be an issue throughout urban Alberta. In fact, I don't recommend that people give money to panhandlers. I ask that they support their local service organizations such as the Mustard Seed or the Calgary drop-in centre because you know where your money is going.

To his specific question dealing with bottle-picking, what that does have in common with panhandling is that it is a local issue, and what works in one area of the province may not work in another area. I would suggest that this member may want to talk to his local alderman or to the mayor, as I have in the past.

Mr. Fawcett: Sure. Well, I'll take another approach and ask my first supplemental to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice. While bottle-pickers may not pose a direct threat to public safety, their presence in a neighbourhood does invite unsavoury activity.

As the minister responsible for safe communities is there anything that can be done to address this issue?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, the safe communities initiative is a holistic approach to crime reduction, and it's intended to look at the root causes of crime. I'm not sure about the specific circumstances that the hon. member mentions, but I would think that we're not talking about recycling as a root cause. We're talking about homelessness, probably, as a root cause. Certainly, this initiative looks at those types of things. It's a multidepartment approach, and the department of housing works on providing help for people who are homeless such as the Pathways to Housing program in Calgary.

The Speaker: Thank you. We'll go on, please.
The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Does the collection and sale of recyclable material by municipalities as part of the curbside recycling programs generate any net revenue to municipalities, and have municipalities indicated any loss of such revenues as a result of bottle-pickers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In most municipalities recycling is not – and I repeat: it's not – a full-cost recovery program, but it has tended to be recognized as a green municipal service that some municipalities provide which may be partly offset by some deposit returns. I expect that the refund revenue is small as many people still use bottle depots or donate their bottles to fundraising organizations. Each municipality has their own policy on recycling, and it really varies from one community to the other.

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

Residential Building Inspections

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the minister in charge of the safety codes system. How can the minister state earlier in question period that the safety codes system works and that he's proud of it when a condominium built in Fort McMurray recently under this government's administration of the safety codes system is uninhabitable?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand the latter part of his question. I want to reiterate to Albertans that I really believe that for the most part our inspection process is doing well. As a result, the Safety Codes Council has competent people working for them across the province, and municipalities, that are accredited, have been hiring excellent people. For the most part, with the majority of our buildings we're doing well.

Mr. MacDonald: Tell that to the condominium owners in Fort McMurray.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs, please: why is there no authority under the Safety Codes Act for safety codes officers to issue orders to assign fault and liability as a result of the breach of the act?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that would become part of the review of the Safety Codes Council. There's no doubt, as we're

looking at that, that those are some of the things we are looking at. The inspectors have a right to actually put a sticker on the building itself as they're moving through the process, thereby stopping a particular building project until issues are rectified and corrected.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: speaking of inspectors' rights, does the Safety Codes Act give authority to a safety codes officer to ask workers employed on a site under inspection for their trade certification? Yes or no?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the municipalities are the ones that are accredited, and they in turn hire their individual inspectors. The inspectors are there to do a job, and that's to inspect under the Safety Codes Act. Their responsibility is to make sure of and authorize the continuation of a particular project. They have that authority to start or stop projects accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Vitalize Volunteer-sector Conference

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing from some of the voluntary groups in Calgary that there have been some changes to their annual Vitalize conference, put on by Alberta Culture and Community Spirit. My question is to the minister of that ministry. Could you please explain and inform this House what some of these changes are to this very important conference for the voluntary sector?

Mr. Blackett: The Vitalize voluntary-sector conference takes place in Edmonton on June 14 and 15 at the Shaw Conference Centre with the theme Shifting Gears and Changing Lanes. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have condensed the conference from three days into two days while we continue to provide support for the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors, an opportunity to hear top-quality keynote speakers, to participate in diverse information sessions such as conflict resolution, fraud prevention, and building your volunteer base, and excellent networking opportunities.

We also added this year, Mr. Speaker, the youth mentor program through a partnership with Alberta's YouthVOLUNTEER! Society. Through this we provide complimentary registrations to one adult mentor and an eligible youth volunteer. It's a great way to recognize youth volunteers and introduce them to potential careers in the voluntary sector.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. As this is one of those very few opportunities for the sector to come together, can the minister explain why these changes were made?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons we made the changes. One is economic. We want to make sure it's still financially feasible for people to be able to attend the conference. We want to reduce our cost. Our goal is, like I said, cost-effectiveness, a more focused learning environment for the participants as the government of Alberta continues to cover most of the conference costs. All the information on the conference is available on the Culture and Community Spirit web page by clicking on the voluntary sectors tab. We will be seeking feedback from the conference participants and attendees to help . . .

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Alberta is a big province, and we have nonprofits from all over the province, so why is the Vitalize conference being held in Edmonton for two years in a row?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we used to alternate, as was mentioned, and it was a significant amount of savings to have the venue in Edmonton versus Calgary, as last year. We're looking at available dates and costs of various venues outside of both Edmonton and Calgary. Like all Albertans we are continually evaluating our budgets and opportunities to deliver quality programming to the sector while being fiscally responsible as well.

I've heard from the sector through our dialogue sessions that they would like us to look at being able to take those dialogue sessions to the different regions of the province and make them available online so that we can get more participation from all the people around the province.

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

2:40 Fort Chipewyan Health Study

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost a decade ago Dr. John O'Connor was forced out of the province for raising alarm about health concerns with cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan. Since then Fort Chip has not received the community health study that was promised to them by this government, a baseline study that should have started decades ago, before development began in the region. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Why does this minister continue to fail the people he's responsible for by refusing to press ahead and complete this health study?

Mr. Webber: Well, hallelujah, Mr. Speaker. Hallelujah. This is my first question this session, and I thank you, hon. member, for asking it. I do encourage more opposition members to become more engaged in the aboriginal issues.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the situation up in Fort Chip we do acknowledge the concerns of the people with regard to the health issues up there, and we continue to work with the community. As a matter of fact, myself and the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness will be going up to Fort Chip very soon.

Dr. Taft: Well, we need better answers than that, Mr. Speaker.

Given that when I asked this question last fall in this Assembly to this minister, the minister said, "It takes time for us to develop some type of a baseline study," how much longer do the people of Fort Chip have to wait?

Mr. Webber: Well, Mr. Speaker, these are complex issues. Of course, we have a letter of intent that we have tried to put together with the three leaders in the aboriginal community up there. We're meeting with Chief Allan Adam, as a matter of fact, to talk to him about what we want to do up in Fort Chip with regard to the health study, and we are hoping that we can gain some progress there in this coming meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I hope this has a good outcome.

Given this government's track record of silencing dissent and covering up the truth, why in the world does this minister expect the people of Fort Chip to sign a letter of intent for a study into their own health when those same people haven't seen either the study's terms of reference or its funding plan?

Mr. Webber: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to let the hon. member know, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has the lead file on this particular issue. Along with the hon. minister I will be going up, as I said, and we hope to get some good progress. I know that there are other health studies that may be required up in that particular area as well that we are working forward on. Again, hon. member, I'm encouraged about the meeting that we are going to have coming up in a couple of weeks, and I would say: stay tuned.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the Oral Question Period for today. Nineteen members were recognized for 114 questions and responses.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Chronic Wasting Disease in Cervids

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's wild deer, elk, and other cervids are at increased risk of chronic wasting disease, which is currently spreading west across the province. The threat of the disease is significant enough that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires mandatory testing of cervid meat in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Yukon whereas such testing is voluntary in all other provinces and territories.

This should tell this government that chronic wasting disease is a serious matter, yet this government has signalled its desire to support game farming, where CWD took hold in the first place. If the government is bound and determined to support an industry that the market hasn't embraced much beyond the breeding herds, then at the very least we must insist that you provide sufficient resources for the testing of all animals on game farms that may reach human or animal food chains, including the velvet, that this government has suggested could be used in pharmaceutical products.

The world was caught completely off guard when another prion disease, BSE, jumped from cattle to humans with tragic consequences for human health and, certainly, the economy. As of yet we know of no cases of chronic wasting disease mutating and jumping to humans, but we have a duty to take every reasonable precaution to ensure that outcome never comes to pass. The consequences are far too grave to even contemplate.

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

Clifton Manor Nursing Home

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an outstanding facility and its dedicated staff. Located in the Forest Lawn area within my constituency of Calgary-East, the Clifton Manor nursing home has served the community for almost 50 years.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, last week the roof of Clifton Manor, which was under repair, collapsed into the lunchroom. Quick action was taken by the staff, who heard the roof creaking, and all residents were escorted out of the room just prior to the collapse. Most importantly, no one was injured, and no residents were displaced from their home. I would like to praise all members of the Clifton Manor staff for their quick thinking and the prompt action taken to ensure that no one was injured.

Mr. Speaker, I was able to meet with the CEO, Mario Siciliano, and the administrator, Brenda Hannah, and many of the staff and

members as well as residents on Friday morning when I visited Clifton Manor. They really are a wonderful group of people.

While the lunchroom is no longer open due to this unfortunate mishap, all residents are able to have their meals in an alternate location. I'm confident, Mr. Speaker, that the roof will be fixed, and all residents of this 254-bed facility will have a new lunchroom soon.

I would again like to commend the staff and the management of the Clifton Manor for their response during this unfortunate event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 17

Appropriation Act, 2011

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the Capital Region Board's 2010 annual report. I'd like to commend the board for its continued dedication to the development of the growth plan for the capital region.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table five copies of the Alberta Association of Architects' 2010 annual report; also, five copies of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta's, APEGGA as we know them, annual report for 2010.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I have two tablings today. The first tabling is documents related to the legal action of Dr. David Candler regarding his dismissal. That was mentioned during one of the leader's questions.

The second set of tablings, with the appropriate number of copies, is related to the Health Sciences Association's support for a public inquiry.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today.

The first is the appropriate number of copies of a study published in the *Canadian Journal of Work and Society*, titled Effectiveness of Complaint-Driven Regulation of Child Labour in Alberta. I cited this study in my questions earlier today.

My second tabling, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, is the appropriate number of copies of a document from the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Associa-

tion, titled Alberta Competitiveness: Impact from Transmission Costs. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to information from this document in his questions earlier today.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling may not be necessary if it's the same study on underage workers in Alberta, but I'll pass it along in case it's a different document.

My second tabling is the business plan for the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association, which represents 2,100 motorized recreational trail users in Alberta.

My third tabling is a newspaper article which highlights the concerns Crowsnest residents have over the logging of the Castle management area. That's from Kelly Cryderman of the *Herald*.

I'm tabling the Forest Reserves Act, which states as its purpose: "All forest reserves are set aside and constituted for the conservation of forests and other vegetation."

I'm tabling a report which evaluated the threat to southeastern slopes, Crown lands, from inappropriate and unmanaged public use.

I'm tabling a Lethbridge public opinion study which showed that a very substantial majority of Lethbridge and Coaldale residents are opposed to the logging project in the Castle special management area.

I'm tabling a public opinion survey which shows the overwhelming concern that citizens from the municipal district of Pincher Creek, the village of Cowley, and other municipalities have for the Castle special management area.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling two reports from Global Forest Watch Canada, which found that the Castle area forest land-use zone is not being managed according to its mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of seven different tablings. One is a newspaper article by Frank Landry from the Leg. bureau. It's about the Premier saying: nothing moves on closure . . .

The Speaker: Hold on. Just table the document. Newspaper articles we don't need to read in the House.

Dr. Sherman: Okay.

The second is from September 7, a CBC newspaper article pertaining to the airport debate.

The third is a government of Alberta Health and Wellness document pertaining to the City Centre Airport, that shows that the key points are the number of patients being transferred that are critically ill.

The fourth tabling is another Health and Wellness document pertaining to the City Centre Airport, where the department recognizes that the city underestimated the number of patients that are flown in, from 8 per cent down to 3 per cent, on flights into the City Centre Airport.

I have five copies of a tabling of a consultant's report from Fitch & Associates titled Alberta Health and Wellness Emergency Health Service Branch Edmonton, Alberta: Edmonton City Centre Airport Closure Impact Study, dated March 25, 2009.

I also have a tabling from Donna L. Towers Consulting Inc., a report to the city of Edmonton regarding medevac transport.

My final tabling is a very important report pertaining to the emergency medical services of this province. After numerous bad

outcomes the Calgary health region commissioned a report from the Health Quality Council in September 2007. This report has all the recommendations made to fix the emergency departments across the province in the health system that weren't followed up on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair received two letters referencing a document tabled by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on Monday, April 19, 2011. The chair has been requested to table the letters, dated April 20, 2011, from Bernie Simpson of Network Health Inc., and Dr. John Cowell of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, both outlining concerns with the document that is Sessional Paper 261/2011.

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. Mr. Snelgrove, President of Treasury Board, return to order of the Assembly MR 2, asked for by Mr. Kang on March 21, 2011.

On behalf of Dr. Sherman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, *Globe and Mail* article reprint dated April 20, 2011, entitled Alberta Doctors Call for Inquiry into Intimidation; Alberta Human Rights Commission website article, undated, entitled Schedule of Upcoming Tribunal Hearings.

Court of Queen's Bench statement of claim dated February 16, 2007, between Dr. David C. Candler and David C. Candler and Kitty Y. Chan Professional Corporation and Capital health, Capital health operating as Northeast community health centre, and Northeast community health centre; Court of Queen's Bench statement of defence dated April 30, 2007, between Dr. David C. Candler and David C. Candler and Kitty Y. Chan Professional Corporation and Capital health, Capital health operating as Northeast community health centre, and Northeast community health centre.

Canada.com reprint of an *Edmonton Journal* article dated August 4, 2007, entitled Disorders Plague Court Psychiatrists, Judge Concludes.

A letter dated October 23, 2007, from Inderjit Singh Chohan of Edmonton to Mr. Elsalhy, hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, advising Mr. Elsalhy of a civil lawsuit regarding racism and abuse of mental illness labelling; a billsundhu.ca website article dated January 8, 2009, entitled Introductory Remarks by B.W. Sundhu, Alberta Court of Appeal, Racist Defamation; Court of Queen's Bench statement of claim dated September 24, 2004, between Inderjit Singh Chohan and Otakar Cadsky, Larry Ohlhauser, Capital health authority, Kenneth Gardener, Glen Baker, the University of Alberta, and Kelay Ohlhauser; Court of Queen's Bench reasons for judgment of the hon. Mr. Justice E.S. Lefsrud, unsigned, dated July 27, 2007, between Inderjit Singh Chohan and Otakar Cadsky, Larry Ohlhauser, Capital health authority, Kenneth Gardener, Glen Baker, the University of Alberta, and Kelay Ohlhauser; Court of Appeal of Alberta civil notice of appeal dated October 24, 2007, between Inderjit Singh Chohan and Otakar Cadsky, Larry Ohlhauser, Capital health authority, Kenneth Gardener, Glen Baker, the University Alberta, and Kelay Ohlhauser.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Webber, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, responses to questions raised by Dr. Taft, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; Ms Calahasen, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake; Dr. Brown, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, on March 2, 2011, Department of Aboriginal Relations main estimates debate.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would ask that the Deputy Government House Leader share with those assembled the projected government House business for the week commencing Tuesday, the 26th of April.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member has already pointed out, the House will not be sitting on Monday as it's Easter Monday, so we'll resume session sittings on Tuesday.

Tuesday afternoon we anticipate second reading of Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011, and then Committee of the Whole on bills 1, 4, 11, and 16. Tuesday evening we will continue with Committee of the Whole on bills 1, 4, 10, 11, and 16 and third reading, if time, on bills 4 and 5 and also as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon we will continue in Committee of the Whole, dealing with bills 8, 10, 11, and 17 and as per the Order Paper as necessary. On Wednesday evening we will again be in Committee of the Whole dealing with bills 8 and 10 and, time permitting, third reading of bills 6 and 7 and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday afternoon, Committee of the Whole again on Bill 8 and third reading, hopefully, of bills 8, 12, 14, 15, 17 and as per the Order Paper.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

[Adjourned debate March 24: Mrs. McQueen]

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. This bill proposes amendments to legislation such as the Electric Utilities Act, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the Coal Conservation Act, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and others to ensure that both government and industry continue to operate efficiently and effectively. This governance bill is needed to support the mandates of the Alberta Utilities Commission, the AUC; and the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB.

We all know how important energy is to our economy and communities throughout our province. The AUC regulates the utilities sector, natural gas, and electricity markets to protect social, economic, and environmental interests of Alberta. The ERCB is an independent agency that regulates the safe, responsible, and efficient development of Alberta's energy resources.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

3:00

It is very important that the energy regulator is equipped to maintain Alberta's high standards and strong commitment to environmental stewardship. A large number of amendments are required to authorize the ERCB to regulate in situ coal gasification and liquefaction technologies. Currently legislation only refers to mining as a means to extract coal from the ground. The develop-

ment of coal through in situ gasification has been used elsewhere, and there is significant interest in Alberta as a location for this type of technology.

The technology has a potential to develop otherwise unminable coal and can produce a synthetic fuel that burns with even fewer greenhouse gas emissions than natural gas. Instead of removing the coal from the ground and transporting it to a power plant to be combusted or turned into electricity, the gas is collected and typically used at the source for power generation or modified by further processing to make it equal to pipeline-quality natural gas.

Two experimental projects have been approved in Alberta under existing legislation, but the rules need to be updated so that they can support the promising commercial development of coal using this method. More applications for approval of in situ coal gasification projects are expected, so it is important that we pass this bill and update the rules.

Provisions in the bill deal with issues such as approvals, inspections, and consequential changes to ensure a complete regulatory framework for extraction and development of coal through in situ gasification or liquefaction. Without amendments interest in this type of energy development may be taken elsewhere. Also, under the ERCB amendments in the bill will repeal an outdated requirement for industrial development permits. Currently the ERCB approves but does not regulate the use of large amounts of energy for industrial and manufacturing operations. This ERCB approval process takes up time for an activity that Alberta Environment already approves and regulates. Given that the ERCB approvals do not require follow-up in any way, these issues are best regulated by Alberta Environment.

Finally, amendments related to the ERCB will enable the regulator to make regulations and to approve amendments to coal permits directly rather than the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The current process requiring an order in council is lengthier and less efficient than it needs to be. This change will bring the process for amending coal regulations and coal permits in line with other industries that the ERCB regulates.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning, this bill also amends legislation administered by the AUC to do with the utilities markets. One of the changes will be to strengthen an existing role of the Market Surveillance Administrator, or MSA, to monitor the functioning of the electricity market. In cases where the MSA is aware of a negative impact on market competition from a rule of the independent system operator in Alberta – this is AESO – they should have the clear authority to challenge the rule. Clarifying the point will better equip the MSA to carry out its mandate of a market watchdog.

The second amendment related to the AUC is to allow the commission to harmonize quality-of-service standards and terms of service between electric utilities and gas utilities. This will ensure that customers benefit from quality service across utilities. An example of where we have differences today is with a rate application from electricity and gas utilities. At present the AUC has a different set of topics they consider for electricity and gas when reviewing the terms and conditions of service submitted as part of that application. For electricity utilities the Electric Utilities Act lists numerous topics on which the commission can make rules. The Gas Utilities Act only lists two topics, limiting the commission in the quality-of-service standards they can issue, to the detriment of gas customers. Due to the differences in the rule-making powers, the commission has issued different standards for owners of electric utilities and for gas utilities. Standardization of these terms and conditions will benefit both consumers and utilities.

In closing, Bill 16 is a responsible bill that updates a broad range of rules related to energy development and the operation of

our utilities sectors. I look forward to members' comments and encourage all members to support Bill 16.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on second reading of the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar in her introduction of Bill 16. It certainly covers a regulatory framework that is very broad. I'm surprised I didn't see this whenever I first had a look at this. The hon. member is quite correct. This is a significant change if one looks at this quite closely. I was thinking of in situ coal gasification developments, but certainly it is with interest that we see these amendments being made to the Alberta Utilities Commission and also the rules around, as I understand it, the abandonment of some coal operations. I'm pleased to hear this, but I'm not convinced that this bill will do it.

I'm pleased to hear that the government is now looking at strengthening the office of the Market Surveillance Administrator for electricity. That's something that needs to be done in the interests of consumers. For a number of years we on this side of the House have come up with some suggestions or solutions as to how that office could work more efficiently and, in our view, diligently on behalf of consumers.

I'm tired of the office just being sort of a promoter or a cheerleader or a defender of electricity deregulation. In fact, three years ago I was reading one of the reports from the Market Surveillance Administrator. Certainly, I took exception to some of the things that were said there, Mr. Speaker, and I specifically took exception to a public presentation that was made by the Market Surveillance Administrator – and I believe it was in Toronto – on how electricity deregulation is working in Alberta and how wonderful it is. I thought that the Market Surveillance Administrator was to be an independent and impartial observer of the supposed market, what the market was or was not doing. But that didn't appear to be the case, and I'm going to have to watch this legislation as it proceeds because I'm not convinced that we're doing enough here.

I understand that we're talking about increasing the oversight provided to the MSA, or the Market Surveillance Administrator, under the Electric Utilities Act and the Alberta Utilities Commission under the Gas Utilities Act. I can understand why we need to do that, but I'm not so certain that this is all we need to do, Mr. Speaker. Now, if you look at your own power bill and you talk to your neighbours, no one shares the enthusiasm for electricity deregulation that the current Minister of Energy has whenever they go to the bank or to the credit union to pay their monthly bill. They see this for what it is, a system that has unfortunately changed our electricity prices from some of the lowest in North America to some of the highest with a very unstable market. Now, will Bill 16 and the changes that are proposed help that market? I'm not convinced yet, but maybe through the course of debate here this afternoon and next week I will be.

3:10

As I said, the act touches many different areas in the energy statutes, and for that reason I would say that it has several objectives, Mr. Speaker. We are creating a framework for the Energy Resources Conservation Board to regulate in situ coal seams in a fashion similar to conventional petroleum deposits. That's a good idea. I see that at a point in the future – and it will probably be occurring in the hon. member's own constituency – we will be

producing gas from our coal seams to generate electricity. Whether or not it will happen in the next five years, that's the question, and only the Minister of Energy could answer that. He has all the secrets of this government.

I'm confident to say that in the next generation or so we will see electricity generated in this province from a fuel source that's generated in place in the coal-bed seam. We all know of the vast resources of coal we have in this province, some of it at deeper locations than others, and that will have, I think, an influence on what is developed, but I'm told that there's research happening all the time. The Minister of Energy would perhaps share that research with this House and through this House to the taxpayers because, certainly, some of that research I believe is going on at the old Alberta Research Council.

For that reason and that reason alone I would like to express gratitude to the hon. member for bringing this forward because I think that part of the bright future for Alberta's electricity generation is through the gas off the coal. We may be on to something with this part of the bill.

We are also looking here at streamlining the regulatory process for conventional coal deposit development. There was a suggestion that we're going to eliminate duplication in the regulatory process for industrial development, which consumes large quantities of energy resources. Those sort of industrial developments, I believe – and I'm looking for examples here – would be Syncrude, Suncor. Am I correct? Pipelines would be another example, where the fuel gas is used to compress the entire system. Would that be another example of what we're doing here?

There's a lot of energy consumed in this industrial development category, and certainly the old regulatory body in its annual report used to note how much, particularly natural gas, was consumed in the industrial process. As we see bitumen production increase in Fort McMurray, we also see the corresponding increase in the use of natural gas to fuel those industrial processes.

If I could through the course of debate get an answer and some more details on that, I would appreciate it. We may not notice it now, when the price of natural gas is low, but that's one of the benefits and one of the drivers of the competitiveness right now with the Fort McMurray region. Of course, it's not that natural gas is inexpensive, but when you compare it to what it was before, it's a bargain. Natural gas is one of the cost drivers in the production of bitumen and synthetic crude oil, and as we produce more, we're burning more gas.

In fact, places like the Syncrude joint venture are trying to secure future supplies of natural gas in the Mackenzie delta. The minister knows this. They got at a fire-sale price a really good gas field up there. There's only one problem. There's not a pipeline built yet. Eventually there will be, and that gas will be used for domestic, commercial, and industrial purposes, I suppose.

Also, with this bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill 16, we are expanding oversight of gas distributors and default gas providers to ensure both system safety and additional consumer protection. Now, we're going to harmonize regulations. "Standardize", I believe, is the word the hon. member used in describing this attempt to work between gas and electricity services to improve things for consumers. I certainly have this question now, and perhaps in committee we can get it answered. How will consumers benefit from this legislative attempt? I would be very curious to receive information on that.

We talked earlier, Mr. Speaker, about expanding oversight of the independent Alberta Electric System Operator by the MSA to ensure efficient operation of the Alberta electricity market. Speaking of the market surveillance administrator, perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy has tabled that annual report and I haven't

caught up to him. I'm anxious to see the latest market surveillance administrator's annual report before I vote on this bill. For some reason I haven't been able to track it down. [interjection] Okay. I appreciate that.

Now, with this bill we're also going to reclassify downstream facilities that process oil sands products as oil sands facilities to encourage investment in downstream activities beyond upgrading. I would like some more details on this if that is possible, Mr. Speaker. How many downstream facilities are we talking about reclassifying here? Where are they? Who owns them? What value do they have?

We talked about the in situ coal schemes and the amendments to the Coal Conservation Act under Bill 16 and this regulatory framework that is proposed. As I understand it, it will close a loophole that currently allows the operation of these in situ coal schemes outside of the majority of conventional petroleum regulatory frameworks. Am I correct in assuming that this is not anything to do whatsoever with coal-bed methane development? If I could get some clarification on that, I would really appreciate it. I would like to know how this is different, if it is, from coal-bed methane development.

The creation of the regulatory framework for in situ coal schemes may encourage research, experimentation, and development that may evolve into a more environmentally friendly alternative to conventional coal use over time and, as I said earlier in my remarks, for the generation of electricity. I, hopefully, will see this happen. I'm very encouraged, and I'm confident that the Minister of Energy is working on this right now to ensure that we can take gas off deep coal seams and use it to generate unlimited amounts of electricity at affordable prices. I'm confident that this is what the honourable gentleman, Mr. Speaker, has in mind.

Now, when we change the definition of coal in defining coal seams, this may turn some marginal coal deposits, Mr. Speaker, from mineral resources to pore spaces, potentially changing the ownership of mineral rights that are owned by a private interest and allowing use of very low-quality coal formations as carbon capture and storage reservoirs. I would, again, like clarification on this. Am I right or am I wrong with that assumption regarding the use of low-quality coal formations? There is lots of high-grade coal in Alberta. There are also many formations that for one reason or another are considered low quality.

3:20

Now, in this bill we're also suggesting there be an elimination of industrial development permits. This elimination would allow for – I don't know whether you can call it rational self-interest. I don't whether you can say that it's rational self-interest that will override collective interest. I don't know. For example, preventing the burning of ethane as a fuel versus reserving it for use as a petrochemical feedstock may be more difficult under environmental regulations.

One of the things that occurred under this Minister of Energy's watch recently – I was surprised at how little public interest there was – is that the minister made some changes to the ethane policy in this province. It certainly benefits some outfits more than others or one outfit in particular, the one that operates in Redwater, in the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater's constituency. I think this is a good step. I heard from some individuals yesterday; they also were encouraged by this.

But it went one step beyond the North West Upgrading and BRIC announcement. This was sort of the other announcement, that did not get as much attention, and perhaps it should have because the ethane industry developed in this province because of direct intervention from previous generations of Progressive Con-

servatives, direct intervention in the market, of all things, to ensure that if people invested in the petrochemical industry in this province, there would be a feedstock that was available and economical for a generation or two. They could recoup their investment and make a few dollars for themselves and employ a lot of Albertans, which happened. It was a good deal.

But lately for whatever reason this government seems to have lost focus. It has come back a little bit with the North West upgrader announcement and the minister's announcement on this. Now, I haven't looked at the fine print in the details of the minister's ethane policy, but I've been told it was the right step. I think we'll see how this works out. Certainly, people in that industry appreciate the support they are getting at this time.

I was at a function yesterday where there was a real estate agent and an engineer sitting beside me, and we were talking about this specific policy. I said to the real estate agent: "You won't be able to sell a house to this engineer unless this man and his company have work. The more work he has, the more disposable income he has, the bigger and more expensive a house you're going to be able to sell him." He goes: "Absolutely right. Absolutely." This is an example of creating wealth within our own province. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Energy over there is trying to distract me, but I'm going to be determined not to get caught up in it.

This act, as I read it, is a mixed measure, as one would expect any amendment package to be. I think it's very wide in scope. Some of the things that the hon. member is attempting to do certainly I would support, and I would encourage her. Some of the other amendments I'm not so sure of at this time, and I have put some questions on the record. Hopefully, we can address those, and I can get an opportunity to read the hon. member's answers or her response in *Hansard*. But the question remains at this point in the discussion at second reading: does the good outweigh the bad in this bill? Does this bill go far enough to protect consumers or benefit consumers of electricity and natural gas?

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I've appreciated the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, as I always do. While I was listening to him, I was also looking through this legislation. I guess the first question I have for the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, if she can bring it back to us next week, is: is this a bill that's going to be held over the summer? The more I look at this bill, the bigger I understand its implications to be.

Ms Blakeman: It's dense.

Dr. Taft: I thought the Member for Edmonton-Centre was saying that I was dense, but she was actually saying that the legislation is dense, meaning that it's packed – it's packed – with meaning. [interjections] I'm getting distracted, Mr. Speaker, by my own caucus members even.

In all seriousness, this looks like a bill that has massive implications, probably huge financial implications for corporations and for the government. There is a lot in here – coal, electricity, oil sands, a lot of technical implications – and I would really urge the government to allow this to sit over the summer in second reading so that it can get a wholesome and fulsome review by all kinds of people so that we can come back in the fall and make sure we have the best possible legislation and that some of the implications of this on royalties, on electricity management, on consumer protection, on the

environment, on the long-term prosperity of Alberta are all assessed fully. That would be, right off the bat, what I would hope the member or the minister will bring back to us next week.

Now, in second reading I'm always looking to discuss: what is the intent of this piece of legislation? In this case it is a bit complicated to answer that question. I'm not quite sure what the full intent is here because it's a bit of an omnibus, a bit of a piecemeal bill that addresses a lot of different issues. I would expect that part of the intent here is to streamline process, to maybe clarify responsibility or to shift responsibility, at least in some cases, from Lieutenant Governor in Council, the cabinet, to arm's-length organizations or at least quasi arm's-length organizations.

I'm concerned that there are other issues here. Alberta is a province that embraces business, which is fine. I want to be very clear that profits are a good thing, that we want our businesses in this province to flourish, to make money so that they can reinvest, so that they can hire, so that they can pay their taxes and support public services and so on.

I am, however, alert to the fact that profit rates in Alberta are exceptionally high when compared to other jurisdictions. For years and years now – and this has been pointed out by banks and by others, and I can certainly provide the member with information along these lines – profits in Alberta have been running at well over 20 per cent of GDP. That's not corporate investment or payroll or anything. That's actually corporate profit. In comparison, in the United States in a good year corporate profits run at about 10 per cent of GDP, as they do in other provinces.

I put that out there as part of the context here. Is this bill about increasing further corporate profits, or is it about some other priorities such as protecting the environment? In particular, I think we need to consider the intent of this bill and its impact on taxes in light of some growing information that's available that the lower our taxes are here in Alberta, the more we simply transfer our wealth to the United States.

3:30

It's a fact that the United States government will tax the foreign earnings of any United States based corporation or citizen at the full American rate. Right now in Alberta our corporate tax rates are running at half or less of the rates in the U.S. If we don't collect that money as citizens of Alberta, it just gets collected by the White House or by the Congress in the States if it happens to be an American-owned corporation. So we're transferring significant wealth from here to fund what they're doing in the States, and as a citizen of Alberta and a citizen of Canada I'm not comfortable with that.

I am concerned that some aspects of this bill such as those redefining oil sands implications are going to have a tax impact here. What will that tax impact be? Are we further increasing profits when they're already at record levels and when those are just going to get creamed off by the Americans? It's a complicated issue. I'm not claiming any position on it right now, but these are the kinds of things that we need to consider when we look at Bill 16.

I'm also interested in what the impact of this legislation will be on the boom-bust cycle. There are lots of early indicators that Alberta is maybe about to enter another boom. Lots of people are forecasting labour shortages. Certainly, when we make our inquiries of our various contacts in the economy, whether it be builders or oil sands operators or people in the energy industry or labour unions, they're all saying: "Yup. This is starting to heat up." Just today or this week, certainly, Mr. Speaker, there has been growing evidence of inflation. So we're in a boom-bust cycle.

Now, we're used to that in Alberta, but it doesn't mean that we can't manage it better. The reason I raise this, that I'd like the mem-

ber to think about in her comments, is: is this going to further fuel the booms and, therefore, further fuel the busts by reducing regulation or speeding approvals or simplifying approvals? All of those in principle are good things, but let me rephrase this in a positive way. How is this piece of legislation going to help us as a province manage our booms and busts and smooth them out rather than fuel them? How is this piece of legislation, through addressing the fundamentals like our electricity system like oil sands – you know, I don't want anybody in here to miss this. This bill changes the definition of what an oil sands product is. Is that something that's going to contribute to the long-term stable sustainability of Alberta's economy, or is it something that's going to open the floodgates of investment into the oil sands even further, exacerbating a boom, which will then inevitably lead to a bigger bust?

I don't know the answer to these questions. I've only started looking at the bill today, but this has to be debated. Along those lines, in this same process, are there environmental implications to the considerations in this bill? Will we be further burdening our water and our land and our air by some of the actions in this bill? These are some questions. I don't want people to think that I'm opposing this bill; I just want to be informed when I vote on it.

I don't think the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had time to get to some of the later sections of this piece of legislation, which, I think is worth pointing out, is quite hefty, actually. I think it's important that we seriously debate in this Legislature the amendments considered for the oil sands industry and our oil sands resource. For example, I'm looking at amendments to the Oil Sands Conservation Act. It seems to me on first reading that we are substantially increasing the definition of oil sands products. I'm going to quote here from the legislation. I'm on page 28 of the bill. What it proposes to do is repeal clause (m) and substitute the following: "oil sands products' means any products obtained by processing oil sands, crude bitumen or derivatives of crude bitumen."

Now, I want to understand the implications of this. You know, the kinds of questions I have in mind are: will this affect what counts as royalties? Will this accelerate or slow the payment of royalties? Does this have any impact on where the ring fences are or whether upgraders or subsequent refining is all captured under the same legislation and on regulations that oil sands mines or extraction processes are captured under? What are the implications of that if it does shift that? Does this, for example, mean that an oil sands company investing in a large refining process or refining facility can count that as capital investment under accelerated capital schemes under the Income Tax Act or under the royalty scheme?

I don't know these. I'm not an expert on the issue, but I hope that the minister or the member will help me with this. I'm asking for your help here. Maybe the industry, who will undoubtedly read these comments, will help us understand that. A briefing would be terrific.

So those are the kinds of issues that I think we should expect and debate when it comes down to Committee of the Whole. It also looks to me like this piece of legislation will change and perhaps streamline the approval process for oil sands plants. Hey, I don't like red tape. If it's good process, let's do it quickly, but let's make sure it's good process.

This bill looks at repealing the entire section of one of the current acts. I think it's the Oil Sands Conservation Act. It looks like it repeals the entire section on approvals and permits. Again, if this is just unnecessary red tape, that's okay. But my concern is that we might be losing some value in this. My concern, also, is that I may be misreading this bill because we haven't had, to my knowledge, much of a briefing on it. Again, this goes back to my very first point, that this legislation ought to sit over the summer so that it can be given full consideration.

You know, I've made a handful of remarks on a quick scan of this legislation on the oil sands, but I want to also address the issue of electricity. I'm very concerned, and I have been since deregulation was brought in, that consumer protection for electricity consumers in Alberta is weak. We all know that there was a lot of gaming of the electrical system in the United States when deregulation was brought in. We strongly suspect – and there was significant evidence brought to the courts in the U.S. – that the same gaming occurred in Alberta under an infamous project called Project Stanley, which was named for the Stanley Cup, which is appropriate given that we're back in Stanley Cup season. It was given that name by the Americans, who couldn't think of anything to associate with Alberta except the Stanley Cup, so they called it Project Stanley. It was run, I believe, under – oh, what was the Houston-based company?

Mr. MacDonald: Enron.

Dr. Taft: Enron, yes. Thank you. I wanted to make sure I got the right company.

Well, we all know what happened to Enron. A bunch of them went to jail. The company went bankrupt. Their pension schemes failed. It is worth noting that Enron did have the ear of this government during the deregulation process. Ever since then I have been deeply concerned that our protection for consumers on electricity in Alberta has been woefully inadequate.

So those are some of my comments. My time is up, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: There is Standing Order 29(2)(a), which allows for five minutes of questions or comments. Any hon. member? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I was actually here when part of that electrical deregulation went on, and I'm interested in hearing any additional points that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview might have to illuminate the rest of us in the Assembly.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you so much to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Well, now that she asks, I want to drive home the point that protection for consumers when it comes to electricity is woefully inadequate in Alberta. We're told over and over by a select group of people in the industry that it's all working terrifically well, but an awful lot of us are very skeptical of that. I think the skepticism is going to rise in ensuing months and years as the price of electricity begins to climb dramatically.

When it comes to this piece of legislation, which addresses some issues concerning the Market Surveillance Administrator, where is the protection in here for the ordinary consumer? The people in my constituency who get bombarded with marketing from Direct Energy, who are confused by the various appeals, who don't know who to trust: is there any safeguard in this bill, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011, for them? Are we looking after the little guy?

I want to remind members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that at one time there was a whole department and a minister of consumer affairs.

Mr. MacDonald: There was a minister of utilities, too.

Dr. Taft: And there was a minister of utilities, and between those two departments Alberta had a terrific electrical system. People had confidence in it. Our prices were low, and our reliability was high. We've not only lost the minister of utilities; we've also lost the position of minister of consumer affairs and protection.

I'd love it if there was in this bill some genuine protection for the small residential consumer who doesn't have the time or the expertise or the capacity to do things like track the hourly price of power and doesn't know how to sort out the Direct Energy marketing campaign from the Enmax marketing campaign from the regulated rate option from anybody else. It's just not fair. So I hope this piece of legislation brings some fairness back to the market from the perspective of the consumer.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked for some other comments as well on coal, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised some issues about coal. Alberta is blessed with a staggering amount of coal. There are times when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and I have wondered if the people of Alberta are actually getting full value for that coal. In a world where coal may be in a decade or two – well, in fact, even as we speak, coal is increasingly getting portrayed as a dirty fuel. What, if any, implications does this bill have on the development and production of coal, on issues around greenhouse gas emissions, and so on?

There is lots and lots and lots in this piece of legislation. I hope the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor or the Minister of Energy will take the time over the next days and months and maybe even longer to address those.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: You have 48 seconds.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, my goodness. The consumer market – what is that guy called?

Dr. Taft: The Market Surveillance Administrator.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Could you talk about that? That was something that was new to me, that I haven't come across. You have a lot of knowledge and experience from over the years. I've never heard of anything like that before, and I made a few phone calls today. The market surveillance administrator: who does he report to, and what's the role? Is that a whole new area that we've got to be aware of?

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are only going to have a few seconds here. I mean, the market surveillance administrator was brought in years ago along with deregulation to try to make sure that the market is functioning and to watch for schemes for gaming the market.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize another member, may I have unanimous consent to revert briefly to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise this afternoon to introduce three people from Rocky Mountain House. We have with us this afternoon Anthony Cerkowniak; his dad, Mark Cerkowniak; and Mark's dad, Mike Cerkowniak. I've got to tell you that Mike was the staff sergeant with the RCMP in charge of the Rocky detachment at the time

when he retired. He told me today, as we were coming in here, that he spent a lot of time in this building as a security officer when he was with the police force. I'd ask them to rise and the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011 (continued)

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in the debate on Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. This is, as I think has already been described or stated, a dense piece of legislation. It is that way because, of course, it's in fact amending, I believe, seven different acts, each of which have, you know, very, very significant implications for both the economic and environmental and community interests of Albertans. It's not exactly a small piece of legislation. While I'll grant you that it was certainly introduced I believe a couple of weeks ago, maybe three weeks ago now – I'm not sure exactly how long ago – what with our scrambling to keep up with budget estimates, with two sets of those per day, we haven't really had a chance to give it as much review as we would have liked.

I will start by echoing the statements of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. This actually strikes me as the kind of piece of legislation that ought to be either tabled or referred to a committee so that there can be greater levels of consultation in front of the doors that were previously closed, behind which, I'm sure, there was some conversation with certain players, so that we can have a full evaluation of what the consequences are of these changes to all Albertans by a varied group of experts.

Now, it does appear to me, according to the briefing, certainly, that we've received from the government, that this act appears to be focused on achieving roughly four outcomes: first of all, to make some relatively minor amendments to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, to add new definitions of coal, the in situ coal scheme, and, in essence, to facilitate the growing development of in situ coal gasification processes. So that's that.

I find it interesting that we are moving forward on that so quickly and so efficiently, in contrast to so many of the other things that this government does or doesn't do, as the case may be. Given that my understanding is that we have roughly two pilot projects, I believe, for this process in the province and that the results of those pilot projects, where we've got ISCG going on, have not yet been disclosed, it's interesting that we are moving forward to establish a regulatory and a legislative regime to enable this type of development while we've got two uncompleted pilot projects. Of course, the purpose of a pilot project is to assess the success of the project which is being piloted, yet the outcomes and the success of that certainly haven't been made publicly available, so one wonders why it is we're going full steam ahead on this particular initiative.

3:50

Of course, although it holds out great potential to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with coal burning – for that reason it's something that we should definitely pursue – at the same time it does seem that there are also some fairly significant concerns around the migration of the contaminants underground as well as what would happen to the adjacent land following a coal-

gasification process. These are issues that do need to be addressed, I think, before we go moving ahead. The results of those pilot projects are not yet public, but apparently the government sees fit to move forward with the changes to the legislative regime.

The second thing that I believe that this act is geared towards achieving is moving forward on one or two of the proposals or the recommendations that came from the government's regulatory enhancement task force, the report having been produced in December 2010. Of course, a number of those recommendations were focused on the notion that industry in Alberta is apparently grinding to a halt – I would have sworn that that wasn't really the case – as a result of the onerous regulatory and environmental obligations imposed upon it. I do find that somewhat amusing given what we've seen come out from sort of more objective third-party sources over the course of the last six to 12 months in terms of how little regulatory oversight we actually engage in with respect to many industrial players in this province.

Nonetheless, we appear to believe we need to actually enhance our failure to keep track of what we're doing in the province and streamline the process. Although I believe there are a plethora of recommendations that are coming forward to achieve this objective, it seems that at least one of them is reflected in this piece of legislation, and that is where this legislation would repeal the requirements for IDPs, or industrial development permits, and also cancel existing permits upon the coming into force of the act. I guess the idea here is to move that permitting process away from the oversight of the ERCB and away from the criteria that are set out in the ERCB's directive 025 around the permitting process and, instead, just move all that over to the Ministry of Environment.

Now, this is why I say that this is quite a complex and dense piece of legislation. In order to assess the consequences and implications of such a change, we need to be able to look at: what is exactly the process that's followed by the Ministry of Environment right now, and what is exactly the process that's followed by the ERCB? How does that compare in terms of a whole number of different measures, both in terms of the objectives and the mandate of each body but also in terms of the opportunities for transparency, the opportunities for accountability, the opportunities for support for the parties who are engaging in the permit process? What opportunities are there for members of the public to engage? What opportunities are there for communities to engage? What sort of notice is there in terms of each of the processes?

To really understand the implications of this change, we need to have a very comprehensive evaluation of the two competing processes, the one that exists now and the one that is going to apparently replace that process because apparently one duplicates the other. But I am quite sure that it isn't a complete and entirely identical duplication, that in fact there are significant and substantial differences between the two. Of course, with those differences, you know, the devil is always in the details. That's invariably where we find out things like, oh, that apparently members of the public don't get to have a role in talking about whether a \$14 billion investment that will end up on their power bills is in the public interest or not in the public interest. That's just one of those little devils that is in the details. Of course, with this kind of change, where we're moving from an ERCB process to an Alberta Environment process, I suspect there are copious little devils in those details that we've not yet had an opportunity to evaluate.

As I was saying recently to the Minister of Environment, I also have additional concerns because, in my view, the record of the Ministry of Environment in terms of general oversight is not stellar. The resources at the disposal of the Ministry of Environment are

certainly not stellar. Since the current Premier was elected, in 2008, we have seen the budget of the Ministry of Environment reduced by 30 per cent. Just yesterday members of the opposition made a point of pulling out the budget estimates of the Ministry of Environment so that we could specifically have a recorded vote about how we do not support that budget because, of course, we have so fundamentally and profoundly compromised the ability of that ministry and the dedicated staff within that ministry to their job.

I mean, this is a ministry, for instance, with just basic processes that anybody using common sense would expect would be in place, where we have 400,000 wells drilled across our land, and we have about a hundred thousand of those wells currently abandoned. We can debate that, well, they're not really abandoned because some day, if unicorns fly, it's possible that long after the current operators have gone out of business, 25 years from now, they might someday decide to use that well. As long as they can come up with their unicorn scenario, we're not going to compel them to clean up any one of those or very few of those hundred thousand wells. In any event, common sense would dictate that where we are, every now and then ever so rarely cleaning up wells, we'd actually have somebody with the public interest in mind double-checking to make sure that those wells are cleaned up before the operator is let off the hook in terms of paying their fees to the landowner and that kind of thing.

But, no, we don't. We don't. We just simply ask the operator to fill out a form and then fill out another form and then fill out another form. Then we have one form, and we have an administrative support person check whether the four forms have been filled out and have been attached to the fifth form. If they have, then a great big rubber stamp goes on it, and we're done. That's how we determine whether or not operators with abandoned oil and gas wells in this province have actually remediated the site, whether, in fact, they've actually ensured – oh, it's true. I am very confident in my sources – very confident in my sources – so I know that that's how it works. We end up in this situation where we are relying on a fundamentally flawed process to determine what levels of contamination may or may not still exist. That's something that is such basic assurance. That is basic, basic environmental assurance, and we're not doing it, and we're not doing it well.

We're cutting the ministry. We're cutting the budget of this ministry so that not only do they not do it well; they do it not well even more – or less. I'm not quite sure. Then we do it at the same time that we anticipate the level of oil and gas development to increase dramatically, so it's completely counterintuitive. In the midst of all that, we're actually going to take a responsibility under this bill and pile that on to the Ministry of Environment and take it away from the ERCB, that somehow manages to have secured to itself a certain amount of resources. We're going to take it away from the ERCB, and we're going to give it to Environment, and we have no idea what that process is going to look like. Why it's better, how it's better, if it's better we don't know because this information hasn't been provided.

In the interests of protecting the long-term best interests of all Albertans, it's really important that we have that information at our disposal, but we don't right now, and I've received none of that from the sponsor of the bill, so I certainly look forward to hearing from the sponsor of the bill on, in particular, what the rights are of people to participate in that industrial permitting process under the ERCB and how that will change when it's moved over to the Ministry of Environment, what the resources are that will be dedicated to that process through the ERCB and how that will be dealt with under the Ministry of Environment, what the criteria are under the ERCB and what the criteria are now that it's under the Ministry of Environment, and what the mandate

is with one and how that will be reflected under the Ministry of Environment. These are all important questions, and until such time as we get answers, we can't even begin to suggest that this is an appropriate piece of legislation.

4:00

The next thing that this piece of legislation purports to achieve is to enable the ERCB to make its own regulations and improve amendments to coal permits directly rather than having to bother the Lieutenant Governor/cabinet with these changes. That is the kind of process that is also worrisome to us because, of course, it removes accountability from government for these kinds of decisions. If one of those decisions is made and the permit is amended in a way that . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Sorry. I guess I'll have to wait for another time to talk about it more.

Instead, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to request leave to introduce amendments to Bill 11, the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act, 2011. I believe that the pages have copies of the amendment, and I will allow them to pass them out before I begin talking.

The Chair: We shall pause a moment for the amendment to be distributed.

Mr. Prins: While the amendment is being passed out, I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to all members my beautiful wife, Pauline, who is sitting in the members' gallery. She's been watching us and learning how we did this very interesting legislative stuff here this afternoon.

I believe most members have the amendments. Do you want me to go ahead, please?

The Chair: Hon. member, please proceed on the amendment.

Mr. Prins: Okay. The amendment will read as follows. This is the amendment to Bill 11. In part A section 12 is amended in the proposed section 10.1 by adding the following after subsection (1): "(1.1) For the avoidance of any doubt, the Minister may not prescribe for the purposes of subsection (1) any activity to which section 18.01 relates." Then in part B section 30(b) is amended in the proposed section 34(1)(a.3) by adding "by or on behalf of the operators on condition that no consideration is receivable in respect of that activity by an operator or by any person associated with an operator" after "of strays."

Mr. Chairman, the primary purpose of these amendments is to provide clarification around the definition of hunting as it relates to strays and concerns over hunt farms, which are not allowed in

Alberta. Changes to section 10.1(1) clearly outline that the regulatory power to issue ministerial permits cannot be used to authorize hunting, which is banned in section 18.01. Permits referred to in this section would relate to transport permits from CFIA, which will be recognized by Alberta Agriculture.

This amendment is being made in order to avoid any doubt about whether or not the minister can prescribe any activity which would override the hunting ban. Activities referred to under section 10 may be statutory exceptions that are authorized under the Agricultural Pests Act or by way of licence under the Wildlife Act. Those are the only activities permitted under section 10.

In addition, the changes under section 30(b) make it clear that the regulatory powers to define the terms “hunting” and “capturing” and “killing” cannot be used so that an operator of a domestic livestock farm can receive money if someone shoots their strays. In some cases it is an industry practice to destroy an animal that has strayed rather than to reintroduce it back into the herd. This is done for several reasons, including preventing the possibility of any spread of disease and protecting the operator’s herd health status. As a result there may be a need for the operator to contract out the destruction of an animal, and in order to be consistent with the hunting ban, neither the operator nor someone associated with an operator can receive money or any other forms of consideration from a person who destroys an animal for an operator.

These two amendments to the Livestock Industry Diversification Amendment Act address a number of concerns brought forward by the industry and help to clarify misconceptions that are circulating. Hunt farms will not be allowed in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, as these amendments have just now been introduced and to allow all members to study these amendments, I would move to now adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15 Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments on this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011. When I spoke to this bill in second reading, as much as sort of on my preliminary review it appeared to have some good pieces to it, I have to say that I’ve now had an opportunity to look at it in a little bit more detail and to determine that there are, in fact, some concerns around the changes that are being proposed through this bill.

4:10

First of all, as I said before, I remain very concerned that the changes that are being proposed as far as the Criminal Injuries Review Board and the process attached to the Criminal Injuries Review Board are in fact not going to result in ensuring that applicants receive fair reviews but, rather, are going to be focused solely on increasing the efficiency of the Criminal Injuries Review Board, particularly as it applies to members of the Criminal Injuries Review Board. I’m a little concerned that, in effect, we’re setting up a process that is going to trap applicants and appellants in a bureaucratic circle from which they will be unable to exit and through which they will be unable to get any actual resolution.

By limiting the authority of the review board to actually make a decision and by suggesting that all they can do is refer the matter back to the original decision-maker, I know from personal experience with administrative tribunals that what will happen is that in many cases that person will be caught between a recalcitrant ini-

tial decision-maker and a review board, which will try with increasing sensitivity to articulate what needs to be done to fix the original decision. But since they don’t actually have decision-making authority, it won’t be done by the original decision-maker, and that person will go back and forth and back and forth and back and forth.

Sort of the foundations of administrative law and one of the key principles behind the establishment of administrative tribunals is, in fact, to increase efficiency and to give tribunals the opportunity to apply their expertise to evaluate an issue and to ensure relatively quick resolution. By injecting this bureaucratic obligation to send the matter back to the original decision-maker, what we are in fact going to do is simply extend the process and in many cases revictimize, I think, the victims who appear before the Criminal Injuries Review Board as applicants. I simply don’t support the amendments to the process that are being put forward through this bill.

The second area that the bill will deal with targets grant funding for programs and organizations. The idea is, theoretically, to ensure that money collected through the youth criminal justice act can be maximized to fund what is characterized by government briefing notes as innovative and new programs. While that’s a good thing – that’s absolutely a good thing – and we need to expand the scope of programs which would be eligible for this funding in some cases, my reading of the amendments here is that simply what it does is it takes this grant funding process away from a victims of crime committee and gives the discretion entirely to the minister as to where that money will go. It increases the opportunity for flexibility, absolutely, but it certainly doesn’t in my view increase the opportunity for an efficacious connection with the stakeholders within the community, so I’m not sure that that’s necessarily a positive outcome.

The area within the act, though, that I am most concerned about relates to the amendments that have been made with respect to the financial benefit program under this act. What, in essence, is happening here is that the minister is changing the rules in some respects about who can apply for benefits through this program. My concern is that, in essence, in contrast to the recommendations that the minister received from a number of groups, including the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, what they are actually doing is limiting, very much limiting, the people who can apply for benefits through the Criminal Injuries Review Board, I believe it is, by changing the limitations and changing the definitions within the limitation period.

Effectively, what this new act will do is that it will say that a person can claim for benefits for up to two years after they become aware of the offence, as opposed to the injury, and that, in any event, they cannot claim any more than 10 years after the offence occurred. In my view, the 10-year absolute cap is an arbitrary limitation, and I think it denies the nature of many of these incidents. In the other respect, what the language used to say was: where they became aware of the injury.

In so many cases what we’re actually dealing with here are victims of domestic violence and domestic abuse. Quite honestly, it’s the case that it takes people much longer than you might expect to become aware of the implications of those injuries. It’s not like getting hit by a car and concluding that you may have whiplash, which, you know, usually shows itself within a week or so of the accident. The types of injuries suffered by victims of crime, particularly where the crime is a form of domestic abuse, are much more subtle and much more difficult to identify. Often they don’t appear right away.

The difficulty with having these kinds of limitations in place, then, is that there’s a particular profile of a victim that we are

going to be very clear to exclude. For instance, when someone is a victim of abuse, whether it's sexual abuse and/or violent abuse or psychological abuse in their childhood, it's not uncommon for those people, for instance, to seek comfort, shall we say, in the wrong place. You know, alcoholism can become, for instance, just as an example, one of the outcomes of being a victim. When someone is suffering from the illness of alcoholism, one is not necessarily in the best place to identify that an offence has occurred and that they are eligible and that this thing is somehow related to that offence and that they are therefore eligible for funding through the Victims of Crime Act. They just aren't.

So the imposition of this language, this change, goes in direct contradiction to what was asked for by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. It is directly geared to limiting the number of people who can access this funding, and it has a disproportionate effect on women and children, who are the most likely victims of domestic violence. That is why it is bad. Based on that, I am going to propose an amendment to this piece of legislation. I'll just take a break while the amendment is distributed.

The Chair: We have an amendment to be distributed by our pages.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, please continue now.

4:20

Ms Notley: Thank you. The amendment that I'm proposing is that Bill 15, Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011, be amended in section 12 as follows: in the proposed section 12.2(2) by striking out everything after "made" and substituting the following:

within 2 years from the date of the injury or within 2 years from the date when the victim becomes aware of or knows or ought to know the nature of the injuries and recognizes the effects of the injuries

and by striking out the proposed section 12.3.

The amendment would accomplish three things. It would keep the language currently in the act around the two-year time limit within which victims are eligible to apply for financial support. It would strike out the bill's proposed 10-year limit from the date of the offence within which victims are eligible to apply for financial support. And the third thing is that where the victim was a minor, this amendment would strike out the 10-year time limit from the date the victim reaches the age of majority regarding eligibility for applying for financial support.

In the current act the two-year time limit applies from the date of the injury or the date of the victim's realization of the nature and effects of the injury. Bill 15 would apply a two-year time limit from the date of the victim's realization of the offence. Now, this amendment would maintain the language currently in the act about the victim's realization of the injury in the place of the bill's proposed language concerning the realization of the offence.

It's important that the act maintain its current language on this issue because women who are victims of domestic violence do not often recognize that they are victims of a criminal offence. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters position paper, published in February of this year following the Solicitor General's consultation on this bill, states:

Women in situations of domestic violence commonly do not identify themselves as victims of crime. Even in situations where repeated and extreme abuse and injury occurs, women often do not perceive their experience this way.

It is, therefore, extremely important that the act maintain its current language stating that individuals become eligible for financial support upon realizing the effect of the injury rather than realizing that they are victims of a criminal offence. This amendment is

needed for women who are victims of violent crime to have equal access to the victim of crimes fund and not be disadvantaged by the effects of patterns of abuse by intimate partners.

This amendment would also strike out the bill's 10-year limit from the date of the offence for eligibility to apply for financial support. The minister has said that the limit is needed to reduce the number of applications being made to the fund, but it is an arbitrary and unfair limit which will prevent some victims from receiving the help and support that the fund was set up to provide.

Similarly, for victims that are minors, the bill imposes a 10-year limit from the date the individual reaches the age of majority. Again, the limit is arbitrary and unfair and will prevent some victims from receiving the help that they need. There is no reason, that I can see, to pick the age of 28 out of a hat and assume that every person who is a victim of sexual or violent or psychological abuse as a child will be aware of the results and the outcomes of that crime at the magical age of 28. There's no reason. It's completely arbitrary, and it's simply focused on limiting benefits for a specific group, a specific population. In that way it is really quite offensive, I think, to people who are concerned about actually enhancing the rights and opportunities of that group.

In the same way, the notion that the 10-year limitation would apply from the time that we're looking at just simply the offence again fails to address the needs and the concerns of people who don't identify the injuries that they have as having arisen from an offence. That goes in direct contradiction to the recommendations and the requests made to this government by the Alberta council on the status of women.

I'm really very, very concerned that this government has taken a position clearly designed to limit access to this fund by a particular group of people, given our record otherwise with respect to our success in eliminating or reducing domestic violence in this province. I can't imagine that people actually intended to do that, and I hope that you will vote in support of this amendment to show to the rest of Albertans that this government truly did not intend to specifically exclude from compensation the children and women who are victims of domestic violence.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, it's 4:25. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 11 and Bill 15. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Those in concurrence with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now adjourn until 1:30 Tuesday afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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