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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.

Tuesday, April 26, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back. Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Hon. members, this being Tuesday, the first day of this week, it's my pleasure to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister for Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some students from the Rosedale Christian school, 18 visitors. We have a teacher, Mr. Ross Wiebe, with them and parent helpers Mrs. Pam Wiebe, Mr. Luke Friesen, Mrs. André Friesen, Mr. Trevor Penner, Mrs. Katherine Penner, Mrs. Lola Reimer, and Mr. Marvin Reimer. I would ask them all, please, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, between 1975 and 1989 Dr. Neil Webber was a member of this House. I remember a discussion I had with him when he left office. I asked him what he was going to do, and he said that it was his dream to establish a university prep school. My immediate thoughts were: well, it's nice to have big dreams. I also thought that a little while later, a couple of years later, when I visited his small school in northeast Calgary that had about 50 students. Well, about 10 years passed and in 2001 Dr. Webber opened the Webber Academy in the Calgary-West constituency. It was expanded to full K to 12 students in 2005 with the first graduating class, and today there are some 870 students who attend Webber Academy. Every year the grade 5 class makes the trip to Edmonton, and the grade 6 class actually gets to travel to Ottawa. Today the Member for Calgary-Foothills and I had the pleasure of having our pictures taken with some 60 bright students from Webber Academy in Calgary. They are accompanied by teachers Jason Ash, Daniel Mondaca, and Heather Gallagher. I would ask them all to stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting group from one of the finest elementary schools in the Edmonton public school system. This school is, of course, in Forest Heights. The group that is visiting today is actually here for the week. They are led by Frau Fritz. This is a German bilingual program. I would now ask them to please rise – I believe they're in the public gallery – and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. We all wish you the very best as you visit us for the next three days.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 35 very bright students from St. Alphonsus elementary and junior high school. They are accompanied by their teachers: Kirsten Kimak, Natalie Altimas, Laura Croome, Melanie Greshuk, and Lori McDonough. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm traditional greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jon and Doug Tupper, here with us today. Jon is an active and dedicated member of the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo community. He's the president of the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce, he's also the board chair for the library board up there, and in January he received from the municipality the volunteer achievement award. He's also very involved in the local PC association. Jon is here today with his dad, Doug. Doug Tupper served nine years on the Edmonton public school board, two years as chair, and he's also former executive director of the Edmonton Police Commission and a former ADM for Alberta Environment. I ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Dr. Walter P. Maksymowych, seated in the members' gallery. Dr. Maksymowych is a professor in the department of medicine, division of rheumatology, at the University of Alberta. He is also a scientist for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, a member of the Canadian Arthritis Network centre of excellence, executive member of the Assessment of spondyloarthritis International Society, scientific chair of the Alberta Rheumatoid Arthritis and Pharmacovigilance Program and Outcomes Research in Therapeutics Committee, and a principal investigator and executive board member of the Spondyloarthritis Research Consortium of Canada. His primary research interests are the genetics of arthritis and advanced therapeutics. He's a leader in medical research. I'll be talking more about his research in my member's statement. At this time I ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the management team and staff from Southgate centre. Southgate centre consists of

165 stores and services visited by 11 million people each year and has been a shopping centre for Edmontonians, including this Edmontonian, for over 40 years. The management team every couple of months takes on a team-building activity, including volleyball or bowling, but this time they've decided to observe a different sport, and we're fortunate to have them with us here today. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to stand as I say their names. Paul Fairbridge is the general manager, and he's accompanied by Paul Gaudet, Sean Kirk, Brett Baker, Jenny Adams, Dalia Nasr, Roxanne Reich, Jillian Creech, Barb Fortier, Margot Lange, Emmy Diamond, Gary Bovencamp, Floyd Maschke, Ismet Korcaj, Jay Heard, Milena Malinovic. I think that's most of them. If there's anyone else, the rest of the staff, please rise. Thank you very much. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

1:40

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three very important women in my life. One gave me life, one helped raise me, and one shares my life: my mother, Santosh Sherman; my aunt, Krishna Sharma; and my partner, Sharon MacLean. All are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jonnee Cenaiko, who is seated in the public gallery. She is the Edmonton-Mill Woods summer temporary employment program student. She likes writing very much, and she plans to write a book. She is highly computer literate. Jonnee just completed her bachelor of philosophy at Grant MacEwan University and will be studying for her master's in Ontario this September. I would ask that she rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege for me today to introduce through you and to you some members in the gallery. They say that pool is like life, that it's not what you take; it's what you leave behind. While this Premier will certainly be leaving behind a wonderful province, he's also been raising a wonderful family. In the gallery today we have his son, Les, and his wife, Dr. Liza Stelmach; and Liza's mother, Audrey Dalzell. I would ask them to rise and please accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I forgot to say that it's his birthday tomorrow, too. I'm so embarrassed.

Members' Statements

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

Dr. Walter P. Maksymowych

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and recognize an outstanding individual sitting in the members' gallery. Dr. Walter P. Maksymowych is a rheumatologist and professor of medicine at the University of Alberta. Dr. Maksymowych is also a senior scholar of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and a principal investi-

gator of the Spondyloarthritis Research Consortium of Canada.

Through his primary research interest in spondyloarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and the genetics of arthritis Dr. Maksymowych has spearheaded great advances in genetic research. Further accomplishments of Dr. Maksymowych have had him at the international forefront of the development of a standardized methodology for the interpretation of imaging data. This is a crucial requirement for studies in the medical research field.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Maksymowych is also a product of our advanced education system, having completed postgraduate training at the University of Alberta and receiving an AHFMR fellowship in 1991. He is now one of the leading professors at the U of A faculty of medicine. I was able to meet Dr. Maksymowych recently, and I can tell you that he is really passionate about his work and the field of medicine.

I once again wish to recognize the outstanding efforts of Dr. Maksymowych, and of course the University of Alberta is honoured to have him there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Long-term Care for Seniors

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Monday in an acute-care bed at the Fort McMurray hospital, on election day, Mrs. Charlotte Mitchell will turn 103 years old. She has spent at least the last three years of her life in this bed, waiting for the government to finally make good on its promise to build a long-term care facility.

Mr. Speaker, despite the bullying and intimidation of this government, I stood up for Mrs. Mitchell and all Alberta seniors who have built this great province, which it is, but our seniors expect more than a government that bullies and intimidates doctors and health care professionals. I'm pleased by the doctors, 6,500 from the Alberta Medical Association, who said: call a public inquiry.

I have a sacred trust with my constituents, a trust they placed in me to represent their voice in the Legislature and not to simply have MLAs carry their voices back to the constituency. I want to say that I've done my job as their MLA to fight for them.

We are beginning to see 40 years of government bullying and intimidation unravel in front of our eyes. They may try to silence MLAs such as myself. They may try to silence doctors such as the MLA from Edmonton-Meadowlark, but they will fail because I believe that Albertans have a higher value, a value that should be applauded, the very value that seniors have fought for to make this province a great province.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud all those who keep to that value. I know that many on the other side of the House, in fact, agree with that value, but they fear that intimidation and bullying. I say that the ultimate test of a person is not during times of comfort and convenience but during times of challenge and controversy. I will continue to fight for my constituents because that is my job as an MLA.

The Speaker: As I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, will you all join with me in wishing her a happy, happy birthday anniversary.

Education Week

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you especially, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and privilege to rise today to give recognition to Education Week, which will be from May 2 to May 6 in this great

province of Alberta. Education Week gives us the opportunity to thank teachers, support staff, school councils, volunteers, parents, students, administrators, and school boards for their contributions to Alberta's world-class learning system.

This year's theme, Education: The Heart of our Communities, expresses the important role that education has in all the lives of children and youth, and it reminds us that education is, indeed, a collaborative process involving strong partnerships at the community level. Strengthening our education system is a shared responsibility of us all here in this Legislative Assembly and amongst all Albertans.

Education, Mr. Speaker, goes beyond the traditional classroom. It is part of our communities, and it is only fitting that we take the time to celebrate the wonders of learning with an integral focus on community. Through our engagement initiatives – Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction, and Speak Out – we have had meaningful conversations with thousands of Albertans in their communities about the importance and value of education today and in the future.

Education Week is also celebrating three subthemes this year: Engaged, Ethical, and Entrepreneurial. These characteristics make for a successful student graduate and, especially, a valuable member of the community.

On behalf of the Minister of Education and all Members of the Legislative Assembly a special thank you to the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association for their hard work to make this year's Education Week a tremendous success.

I encourage all Albertans to take part in events in their communities and to celebrate the teachers and all of the community stakeholders who every day are making a difference for children.

Thank you.

University of Alberta Campus Development

Dr. Taft: In October 2009 this government in conjunction with the University of Alberta and the Urban Land Institute invited a panel of North America's top experts to review the university's south campus plans. Last week that panel posted its final report, and the opportunities are tremendously exciting. They also pose a huge challenge to the university and to this government to take new approaches.

The south campus includes over 600 acres of mostly undeveloped lands near central Edmonton served by the LRT and surrounded by mature communities. The ULI panel described the south campus as a remarkable chance for the U of A and for Alberta as a province to show global leadership. The panel believes that with the south campus Alberta can establish an international reputation for sustainability, but it makes it clear that bold measures will be needed. The ULI panelists, mostly from the private sector, urged the university to embrace a long-range mission of deep green sustainability based on this inspired principle: "If everyone on Earth lived like the community at the University of Alberta's South Campus, we'd arrest climate change and live [sustainably] within the limited resources of our one planet."

The ULI report is filled with ideas that could help the university on its quest to be among the best 20 public universities in the world, but the university cannot do this alone. The provincial government needs to be a full partner in developing and following a plan that is visionary and detailed in ensuring that implementation is done with discipline and that every step of the way the people who live near the university must be given full voice.

The ULI report is well worth a read for anyone interested in the University of Alberta's future and the betterment of this province.

There's a green and golden opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, one that we should seize with both hands. Thank you.

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, Mr. Speaker. This government's culture of fear and intimidation knows no bounds and has now taken root in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at the University of Alberta. Over the past six months the Canadian Association of University Teachers has become aware of concerns of intimidation and threats and is now investigating allegations at the U of A that include, quote, creating a climate of uncertainty, mistrust, and fear. To the Premier. Sixty-five hundred doctors, 21,000 health professionals calling for a public inquiry, now intimidation at the University of Alberta. What excuse does the Premier have today not to call a public inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I haven't had time to fully review the document that the Liberals put out a news release on, but there is nowhere in this document that the government of Alberta is mentioned. This is simply a grievance matter between the university and some professors. It has nothing to do with the government of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Well, to the contrary, Mr. Speaker. Given that the senior vice-president of the U of A has, quote, instructed the university staff not to co-operate with the investigation, end quote, how can this Premier continue to ignore that a culture of fear and intimidation exists? It starts at the top. Do you really think that by ignoring the problem, it's going to disappear?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is a grievance matter, and there are processes in place at the university to deal with it. There's a list of grievances that a few professors have put forward, but the provost has replied. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has replied. Nowhere in this document has the government of Alberta been mentioned, nor is there any request for any kind of a public inquiry.

Dr. Swann: Of course, most of these are joint appointments with Alberta Health Services Board, which the Premier knows. Given that over 30,000 doctors and health professionals have said that a Health Quality Council review is not good enough and given that the government's culture of fear and intimidation has now spread to the University of Alberta, what else does the government need in order to call a public inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I do believe in academia independence. That is for the University of Alberta to resolve. They have their own body that serves as the mediation body between the university and its professors. It's best left to the processes that are in place, and those processes have been in place for many, many years.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, evidence of the culture of fear and intimidation that this Tory government perpetuates continues to grow daily. Just this weekend former cabinet minister Ernie Isley said that the Tories have used intimidation tactics to

keep people, lobby groups, and community agencies in line. It's no wonder that the Alberta Medical Association, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and many other Albertans have endorsed a public inquiry. Why does the Premier continue to insist that there's nothing wrong when even former Tories are saying that your government uses intimidation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly it. The member is talking about a former Tory, someone that has decided to join a party to the far right. He is free to make any kind of comments in the province of Alberta without intimidation.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier has nothing to hide and is so sure things have changed, why won't he commit to a public inquiry, where senior bureaucrats and ministers can be subpoenaed to give evidence under oath? What are you afraid of, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Health Quality Council has begun its review. They're proceeding very quickly, and all those physicians that may want to bring forward any issues or maybe talk about improvements to the system that may improve patient care or access to emergency cancer treatment – the council is now opening its hearings and is willing to listen to all of the evidence.

Dr. Swann: How can the Premier ignore the basic fact that the Health Quality Council review is in a conflict of interest when its members are appointed by the very minister ultimately responsible for the alleged acts of intimidation? There's a disconnect here, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: I guess the hon. member doesn't understand the two different authorities. If we were to do the same with the public inquiry, the minister would be setting the terms of reference and also appointing the members to the public inquiry. This is a separate authority. The membership is well known, plus it has some of the best legal minds giving them advice.

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

Health Services Decision-making

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here in Alberta a person's word counts for something. When you make a promise, you keep it. The Premier promised on this PC letterhead during the election to build 800 long-term care beds for our seniors. He promised that nothing moves at the City Centre Airport until the Health Quality Council does a review of medevac services, and he promised that the third way in privatization of health care was DOA. To the Premier: which one of these promises have you kept?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all of them. In fact, I thought we would have built about 800 continuing care beds. We're now past 1,100, and we probably will be at about 1,300 when this first phase of construction is finished.

With respect to the airport I said that the medevac services will not cease until such time as we hear from the Health Quality Council. That report is imminent; that's coming forward.

Of course, the third. We've met all that was said in that letter, and that hon. member knows that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that your successors are circling the province and your ministers refuse to keep the promises you made while you were in office, how can Albertans be sure that any of your promises will be kept, including the minister's five-year action plan, now that your term as leader is up?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, at least he's showing confidence that under my watch it will be delivered, I suppose.

In all honesty the member brings forward important issues with respect to health. That's why I'd like to see the first report from the Health Quality Council made public. It'll be made public within three months and then the second report in six months and the concluding report in nine months. We fast-forwarded the report to be delivered, and we'll be able to carry on once all the evidence comes in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that as an MLA you had input into the Mazankowski report, Bill 11, and phase 1 and phase 2 of the Alberta Health Act, but you denied authoring it, who is directing the government's plan to Americanize our cherished public health system? Is it the members for Calgary-West, Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Rutherford, Sherwood Park?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about Americanizing the health system. He was there. Perhaps he could elucidate others on that.

What I can tell you is that we have the first-ever Canadian commitment by a province to five years of stable funding, unprecedented anywhere, and we have a Premier with the courage to have delivered it, and we have the courage to make sure it happens.

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

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I am safe to say that all hon. members of this House desire to do the right thing and that the Premier is at the top of the list. The right thing is to be open and accountable. It is only a matter of time until the Premier does the right thing and calls a public inquiry. We know that the top advisers to the Premier are telling him that the Health Quality Council can do the job, but it is his legacy and not theirs that is at stake. So does the Premier want to be remembered as the king of cover-up or as the Premier who cleaned up with a full public inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Health Quality Council has begun its hearings. They'll ask for input. Once again, the Health Quality Council has put together, I believe, a legal advisory committee with some of the best legal minds and a tremendous reputation that will give the Health Quality Council advice during this period, and that is, of course, former Chief Justice Al Wachowich and former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada Anne McLellan.

Mr. Hinman: Don't let them pin you as the king of cover-up. Given that both parties must agree to waive a nondisclosure agreement, will the Premier do the right thing and direct Health Services to take the first step and declare that they would like to

have full disclosure of the controversial nondisclosure agreements? Take the first step.

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the disclosure agreements have been entered into by the physician and the employer, and a third party cannot just tear up the agreement or direct any one of the parties to open that agreement. An agreement is an agreement, and that agreement is between those two parties.

Mr. Hinman: You're not anybody; you're the Premier. You could ask them: let's open it up.

Mr. Speaker, given that the truth can set anyone free and given that the Premier and many others of this government say, despite all the evidence, that there is no proof, will he please do the right thing? Call the public inquiry so Albertans will have the truth out in the open. Be accountable. Do the right thing.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, so far, even in this House, there have been various allegations made with the protection of immunity of the House, yet – what? – six months later there has been no evidence tabled in the House, even circumstantial evidence, I may add, as was brought forward the other day. So why would a person conduct a public inquiry? There isn't even any circumstantial evidence, just allegations and, once again, no proof at all here in this Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, at least on nine occasions in recent years the word "cover-up" was ruled unparliamentary. On one occasion it was allowed in the context of what it was. So one should be very careful of the context that one uses a word like "cover-up."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Representatives of Alberta industry say that this government's massively overbuilt transmission proposal will make them uncompetitive, no surprise since this PC government is ramming through \$13 billion in unnecessary costs that will be added to the power bills of Alberta consumers. Given this disaster in the making, will the Premier agree to repeal Bill 50 and require all transmission projects to be subject to a full regulatory hearing to ensure that they are needed, affordable, and actually in the public interest?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there were at least 300 public hearings. Many Albertans, businesses brought forward information and evidence with regard to the need for new transmission. I just want to correct the member. He's talking about \$13 billion. The CTI is around \$3.3 billion. For every billion dollars of new construction it adds about a dollar to the monthly bill, so that would be about \$3.30 added to the monthly bill once all of the construction is done, and that will be about five, six years from now.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this Premier can spin straw into lead.

Given that the same power consumers are warning that increased costs may trigger a death spiral, where those who can afford to build their own generation will do so, leaving fewer and fewer customers to pay the multibillion dollar costs of these unneeded lines, and given that most homeowners and small businesses would be stuck with huge power bills as a result, will

the Premier direct his Energy minister to stop the death spiral of our electricity grid and require full regulatory hearings for all the transmission lines now under construction for consideration?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, power consumption increases 3 per cent annually, and even in our worst recessionary year we saw an increase in power consumption. Our population has more than doubled since the last addition to any infrastructure was added in this province. Essentially, what we're doing is that we're burning more coal and getting less energy to the consumer because we're overloading the lines, and we're losing a lot of power along the transmission lines.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this government has eliminated public regulatory examination of proposals for new transmission infrastructure and substituted closed-door cabinet meetings that rubber-stamp these proposals, why should we take your word for it that these transmission lines are actually needed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe 2001 is when the hearings started, and they were conducted over a number of years, talking about the need for additional transmission.

I would be a little more worried about what I heard this weekend in terms of increasing our costs of energy in the province of Alberta, and that was the hon. member's cousin – I believe he was from Quebec – talking about imposing a cap and trade system and a carbon tax on energy in this province. I can tell you that will more than double our electricity in the next five years.

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

Health Quality Council Review

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some more questions for the Premier. The Premier and the minister of health continue to say that the Health Quality Council review is fully independent from government. It's a fact that the government appointed the Health Quality Council board, funds its operations, and the board chair, Dr. Lorne Tyrrell, reports directly to the minister of health. Again to the Premier: how can the government ignore the basic fact that the Health Quality Council review is in a conflict of interest when its members are appointed by the very minister ultimately responsible for the alleged acts of intimidation being investigated?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Health Quality Council has a tremendous reputation, a good, solid reputation, in terms of examining a number of issues. They are independent, and they have in many cases been critical of government, telling us where we can improve the quality of health delivery in the province. I have tremendous faith in them to do the job, and they will. They'll deliver that report much sooner than any kind of a public inquiry will do.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: will the Premier direct Dr. Tyrrell, dean at the time, to appear before the Health Quality Council and share relevant information relating to Dr. McNamee's dismissal?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's amazing how just a few months ago the hon. member talked about how he was praising the Health Quality Council, and that this was the best avenue to do an inquiry and hear evidence in terms of how to improve the health care sys-

tem. Today they've changed their minds once again and said that the Health Quality Council cannot do the job. Well, I disagree, and our government disagrees and so do the public of Alberta. This inquiry is on its way, the review is being done, and we'll hear soon with respect to how to improve our health care system.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier continue to argue against the need for a public inquiry when the Health Quality Council is clearly in a conflict of interest and may hear testimony from its own board chair? How do you reconcile that?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, enough of this nonsense and false accusation because the Health Quality Council itself is . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member, the Minister of Health and Wellness has been recognized.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you so much. In fact, the Health Quality Council themselves would tell you that none of the reports that they have ever done have been altered in any way, shape, or form. Not a word has been changed. They've got very broad terms to work with. They have discretion as a council. They have a commitment to make their report fully public. I would ask this hon. member to please comply with the process and deliver on the good words he had about them before.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public and Catholic school boards across the province are all saying the same thing. Because of this provincial budget teachers and support staff will need to be let go. Furthermore, they're all saying that the minister's suggestion of dipping into reserve funds is simply, in a word, ridiculous. Accordingly, will the minister come clean and tell this House approximately how many front-line teachers and other staff Alberta school boards will be forced to lay off because of this year's upcoming budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, no, I can't tell this House how many teachers might be laid off or how many teachers might not be hired. It would be depending on how many retirements there might be in particular jurisdictions, how many people choose to leave for maternity leave, and various other things that go into the makeup of the teacher force every given year. Yes, it's a tight budget. Yes, school boards are having to look very closely at their expenditures, and yes, in some cases, perhaps in many cases, that might impact the number of actual certificated employees that they have next year over this.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that parents across this province don't believe the minister's pronouncement that school boards can keep teachers in the classroom by dipping into reserve funds, will this minister do the right thing and stop the last day of school for students this June from becoming the last day of teaching ever for hundreds of teachers?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hundreds of teachers who have put in their 35 and 40 years of service to this province and are looking forward to retirement should not be stopped from having that last day if that was their choice. So, no, I'm not going to say that nobody is going to have a last day this year. Of course, people are going to have last days. Some are going to choose to have it and some may not, depending on what a school board has to do.

But the hon. member should know that there's \$350 million in operating reserves across the province so that any school board looking at a very tight budget is well advised to look, as we have with our sustainability fund, and say: what reserves, what other options do we have first before we affect the classroom?

2:10

Mr. Hehr: Given that this minister has admitted publicly that letting teachers go at this time is the opposite of planning for the future, will this minister commit to ending the current silliness and ask the Treasury Board not to balance this year's budget on children's and our province's future prosperity?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've just spent the last couple of months in Committee of Supply and policy field committee examining the various aspects and their various opportunities and the challenges that face a government when it tries to meet a number of value equations. How much can we put into investing in people's health? How much can we invest in people's education to ensure the future of the province? How much are people prepared to pay for in their taxes in a given year? Can you tax your way out of a recession? All of those various items go into pulling together a budget, which we've just had the privilege of spending the last two months debating and will have the privilege this week of passing in our appropriation bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Logging in the Castle Special Management Area

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groups of individuals in southwest Alberta recently called for a boycott of timber products from the Castle area to protest timber harvesting there, potentially putting 200 people's livelihoods at the Spray Lakes mills at stake. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What impact does timber harvesting have on the landscape, and is it affecting tourism in the area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, if you look at the record over the years with respect to Castle, I think it's an exemplary record of what can be done with proper management. That area is under a forest land-use zone designation. That is a legislated designation, and it meets the goals of preservation, heritage appreciation, recreation, and tourism and economic development. I think that it has been managed very well. In fact, the opportunities for tourism still abound.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Opponents of timber harvesting in the region say that it should not take place because the Castle is a special area. If so, why has there been harvesting in this area for all these years?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Castle area was one of about 82 areas that were looked at and proposed as special areas in a project in Alberta in 1998, '99, and 2000, I believe, but Castle was never one of the areas that was actually accepted. Local communities in the area actually told the government that they wanted to see the area managed as a multi-use zone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. What kind of protection is in place to ensure that harvesting does not affect the important watershed that flows out of the mountains in that area?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had a lot of work done there. As a matter of fact, the Bow Valley watershed area has been studied extensively, and it has received a good quality recommendation, which is the highest recommendation in that watershed area. Since 2007 Sustainable Resource Development has employed hydrologists to make sure that forest management planning respects that watershed and the integrity of the watershed.

Education Funding (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, in the latest in a string of announcements from across the province the Lethbridge public school board has now had to announce as well that it will lay off 60 teachers and staff because of budgetary constraints. The school board's hands are tied because of this government's short-term planning and cuts to education. To the Minister of Education: is the minister's only response to the latest announcement of teacher cuts in Lethbridge that they, too, should dip into their reserve funds as you have suggested be done in Calgary? When the boiler blows, who's going to pay for that? That's what reserve money is for.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School boards across the province have saved monies out of their operating surpluses in any given year to build operating reserves for a variety of reasons. Many of those same school boards also have capital reserves. A few school boards have taken the position that they should spend today's dollars on today's students and not build up reserves. Everybody's situation across the province is different. Across the province there is approximately \$340 million in operating reserves and an additional \$200 million more or less in capital reserves, so there is \$500 million in the education system in reserve. Now would be a good year to look at that and say that we have challenges.

Ms Pastoor: When Lethbridge not only needs a new school, but three of its existing schools need upgrades badly, projects that are now under threat along with teaching positions, how can the minister justify cuts to this Education budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Education budget went up 4.7 per cent this year. It went up \$258 million this year. It went up by a substantial sum of money, but it is going to be a tough budget for school boards, absolutely. We all have the same issue to address on a year-over-year basis. If we want to be fiscally prudent, if we want to live within our means, we have to look at everything we do to determine: does it have value? How do we do it better? This year school boards are having a very difficult but necessary time looking at their budgets, looking at their operating reserves, and saying . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Pastoor: Well, a prudent budget, but it certainly doesn't make our students competitive with China.

Given that very successful programs like the career transitions program, which are designed to encourage high school completion

and help students in the challenging transition from high school to the workforce or secondary education, are under threat because of the cuts, how can the minister claim that this government has students' best interests at heart?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there are in any given school board programs that have great efficacy and that are very valuable for students. The AISI project right across the province, in many jurisdictions, has been very good. But we're in a tight fiscal time frame, and as a government we've determined that we need to get back into a balanced position over a period of time while there is still money in the sustainability fund. You cannot use the money in the sustainability fund over and over and over again, so we have to be prudent in budgeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Pipeline Leak

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday afternoon a pipeline break within Whitecourt-Ste. Anne was reported to the government of Alberta's co-ordination and information centre. The county, local residents, and I want to ensure that all has been and will be done to ensure minimal environmental impact. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Can you please provide an update on this break and the current status?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As is standard protocol, after notification we immediately dispatched an Alberta Environment officer to the area. He found that the pipeline break was releasing an oil and water mixture. At that point there was only a slight sheen visible on vegetation at the break point and no impact on water bodies. The company immediately established an emergency operation centre; set up a hydrovac, booms in creek, and monitoring program; cleaned up anything with a sheen; and began repairs to the pipeline.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. While you talked about notification of the incident – and it was provided to provincial and federal agencies and to the county – I'm not sure it was provided to the neighbouring residents. Can you explain the notification protocol for these occurrences, please?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the standard protocol for notification is different in the case of whether or not there is a public health risk involved. In this case, as it was a very isolated situation, there was not a public health risk. The municipality would have then been contacted by the company. Had there been a public health risk involved, then Alberta Emergency Management would have been activated. The municipality would have been involved, and they would have been notified by the provincial government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that pipelines are a critical transportation method of supplying energy to our marketplaces, is there any indication that this will impact future projects?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that it shouldn't. However, we live in a day and age when those who want to rid the world of resource development will use just about any kind of an incident to play up a situation. I think what we have to put into context is that we have literally millions of barrels of oil leaving this province every day by pipeline, and the incidents are very few and far between, as this one was. So I don't see an impact in the future.

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

Corporate Tax Advantage for American Companies

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. American companies operating in Alberta not only pay Alberta and federal income tax but American corporate tax as well. This is because of a tax treaty which subjects Canadian earnings of American companies to U.S. taxes if the tax rate in Canada is lower than the rate in the U.S.A. The difference in tax rates is then pocketed by the U.S. Treasury. My first question is to the minister of finance, please. How much corporate income tax is paid to the U.S. Treasury by companies operating in Alberta due to this treaty arrangement?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that number at my hand.

Mr. MacDonald: That's unfortunate given the billion-dollar deficits that this government has racked up.

Now, if this is such a significant transfer, as is reported in the media, how much, again, in Canadian dollars is being collected by the U.S. Treasury that should remain in this country and in this province?

2:20

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we'll be happy to get correspondence from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Besides looking at other loopholes that corporations use, we are engaged with the federal government in trying to recover money that's wrongly run through offshore companies. It's an ongoing process. I'm happy to get information from the hon. member and follow it up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record that was in the *Globe and Mail* last week. [interjections] Of course it's true.

Again to the minister of finance: will the minister order the finance department to look into ways to close this giveaway to Uncle Sam and put an end to this voluntary equalization that Albertan taxpayers are providing to the U.S. Treasury?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I checked recently. We're still a part of Canada. We'll remain a part of Canada for quite some time, I hope. We will work with our counterparts across the provinces and with the federal minister to address any of the said loopholes that he's identified.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Agricultural Trade with China

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a delegation of government officials representing Heilongjiang province in

China visited our province and were introduced here in the House to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Alberta's twinning with Heilongjiang. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Certainly, that relationship is important to agriculture producers inasmuch as it expands trade. Market access is primarily a federal responsibility in terms of the negotiations, but is there anything that the province of Alberta and the minister of agriculture can do to expand trade and market access with China?

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

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I was honoured, actually, to be involved in the meeting with the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and the Heilongjiang delegation: a 30-year relationship with our province, a 60-year relationship with China with respect to our wheat exports. These face-to-face meetings are absolutely necessary with government officials in order to open up those opportunities in those countries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the minister of agriculture visited China last year. I'd be interested to know on behalf of cattle and agriculture producers: were there tangible results that came as a result of that visit?

Mr. Hayden: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. In June 2010 we secured a breakthrough with the Chinese government officials into their market for beef and tallow for animals under the age of 30 months. Our trade mission to China gave us an opportunity to talk about what type of trade irritants there were and to gain important insights into what the government of China wanted from us. Of course, it's huge for us. In 2009 our export market was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$8 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question will be directed toward the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What is the overall potential of the Chinese market? We know it's significant, but what is the future look of the Chinese market for Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we've had such a tremendous amount of opportunity, as cited, in agriculture. Certainly, culturally we have been building a market that is both tourism linked and also with the building of a stronger Alberta, and economically PetroChina visited and has become a very robust partner in our sustainable resource development. Through education, built by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, is a tremendous amount of buoyancy on advanced education, innovation, and technologies. So on several fronts we're doing things that build the Chinese market.

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the *Calgary Herald* Dr. Tim Winton, former head of lung surgery in Edmonton, said that legal assurances offered by the Health Quality Council review are not adequate to allow him to speak about allegations of intimidation of doctors or about those who may have died unnecessarily on cancer wait-lists. Dr. Winton, who was named in the Dr. McNamee statement of claim, would likely have key insights into this

matter. To the health minister: how can you continue to claim that the Health Quality Council can get to the bottom of this scandal if those like Dr. Winton, who know what happened, cannot be protected nor subpoenaed to testify?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and all Albertans that the Health Quality Council review is at the highest level of integrity. In the words of the Health Quality Council president and CEO himself, he said that their review will be equal in gravity to a public inquiry. He says that with confidence, knowing that no one has ever refused to participate when asked by the Health Quality Council for their input.

Mr. Anderson: Well, he just refused the Health Quality Council, so that's not true, Mr. Speaker.

Given the following quote from Dr. Winton, who says, quote, despite assurances advanced by the Health Quality Council, the Premier, and the health minister, I remain constrained by contractual arrangements, but I recognize the interest in securing my participation and would welcome the opportunity to provide evidence, unquote, will the minister please reconsider his position and call a judicial public inquiry with the powers to compel evidence and both subpoena and protect witnesses so that we can get to the bottom of this scandal for all Albertans? Do the right thing, sir.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council may not have what he describes as legal authority to subpoena anyone to attend, but they do have extremely high credibility, the highest in this province I would submit, for relating with medical people. Whenever medical people have been asked or, for that matter, any members of the public or anyone else has been asked to participate, the Health Quality Council has never been refused that particular . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Given that this minister has clearly lost any shred of credibility with the public that he's acting in the best interests of Albertans on this matter and given that he is obviously more concerned about the health of his own political career and that of the PC Party and given that Dr. Winton states that the re-establishment of public trust in health care demands that he and others be free and protected to speak out about the truth, will this minister call a public inquiry, or if not, will he resign and pass the baton to someone in that caucus over there, if there will be any left, that is still committed to transparency and putting the health of Albertans first?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council is a very respected, very reputed, nongovernment, directly involved type of organization. They are very independent. They will listen to whomever wants to come forward. If the doctor referenced just now by this hon. member wishes to come forward and bring information, he's welcome to do that. If he chooses, on the other hand, not to for whatever personal or professional or private reasons he has, that is up to that particular member because we respect their privacy as well.

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

Residential Building Inspections

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The Minister of Municipal Affairs said in this Assembly that municipalities are responsible for build-

ing inspections. However, the public safety division of the minister's department is the third-largest provider of safety code services in the province. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will the minister kindly acknowledge that the province plays a major role in building inspections and must accept its share of responsibility for the failure of the system that we have seen in the Penhorwood incident in Fort McMurray?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in past comments here in the House, the responsibility for home inspections falls under our purview with Municipal Affairs, but we accredit municipalities, and the municipalities hire their inspectors, and they are responsible for the actions of their inspectors. The larger centres, the cities, basically, across Alberta, do hire inspectors to do that work.

Now, in those municipalities that are unaccredited, we will do the inspections on their behalf.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's not right to put all the blame on municipalities, sir.

Can the minister please explain what kind of inspections are conducted during the construction of a home or a condominium project?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the Safety Codes Council is the one responsible for accrediting municipalities. We accredit municipalities, and we accredit agencies that do the inspections, that hire the particular inspectors. There is no doubt that the inspectors have a mandate to follow, and we expect that. We continue to keep on working with our municipalities to make sure that the inspection services or those individuals that they hire are doing an appropriate job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's this government that's not doing an appropriate job.

Given that there's a particular concern about the current value of inspections, what value could a homeowner expect from just one inspection?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that there are building codes that need to be enforced, and, you know, we want to make sure that those codes are being met. The inspectors will go through a particular process. Again, as I've indicated, if there's a need to change that particular process to meet the changing needs of Albertans, I'm prepared to look at that. If there's a need to do more inspections, for instance, they're in the envelope portion or construction portion . . .

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

Strathcona Community Hospital

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems like a day doesn't go by when my constituents don't ask me about the Strathcona community hospital project. I know the Member for Sherwood Park gets as least as many. Can the Minister of Infrastructure provide an update on the Strathcona community hospital project? Specifically, can the minister explain what work has been completed so far and what work remains?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to inform you and the House that the project is moving ahead full speed. Phase 1 of the construction is under way and scheduled for completion in the latter part of 2012. The site services are completed, including the sewer and the waterlines, and also the paving and the landscaping. The foundations are completed. The steel structure is near completion. The building envelope is well under way. The move-in schedule is for 2013, and we're currently planning ahead to ensure a seamless transition from phase 1 to phase 2.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First supplemental to the Minister of Health and Wellness: knowing how important this project is in meeting the health needs of constituents, can the minister confirm what services will be provided at the Strathcona community hospital?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the services will include a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week emergency department, diagnostic imaging, community laboratory, ambulatory clinics, including IV therapy for teens' and for seniors' health, allied health services, chronic disease management services. It will also have medical consultant specialists. They'll be there along with all the support services necessary. That's all part of phase 1, which is full steam ahead right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supplemental to the same minister: what will phase 2 of the project offer area residents?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, phase 2, which will be proceeded on immediately after phase 1 is completed – and some planning is already under way – will see approximately 72 in-patient beds as well as surgical suites, and those surgical suites will have all the supports and services necessary for that hospital to function as an in-patient facility. The precise details and components will be still input into by the community and by other health professionals.

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

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the Easter weekend an adoptive father reported that his child had once again been apprehended. However, due to the revolving door children and youth catch-and-release system, if the child again submissively played the system for 72 hours, their previous escapes, their previous assessments, their birth family's history of illness and abuse would not be taken into account. Instead of a secure treatment facility, they'd be back to another easily escapable group home. To the minister: why is a 72-hour-only assessment the equivalent of a get-out-of-child-custody-free card?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had an opportunity to discuss this with the member, I think about a week or so ago, and I know from that discussion that this member has become very involved in the situation. I can assure you that the child that you have brought forward is being well cared for, hon. member, and I'm hoping that that helps.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Three escapes so far. At what point, if ever, in the current catch-and-release Children and Youth Services system does a child's cumulative assessment file get opened and acted upon?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our workers do provide supports and resources and services to the child, to the youth, to the family, and files regarding children's services and supports are kept open when necessary by workers. I can assure you once again, hon. member – I know that you explained to me that this has become very personal for you – that this child is being well cared for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much hope so.

How is it in the best interests of a child or their parents to revolve through the system and land back onto the street without receiving sustained treatment or support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated previously in the Assembly about this young person, hon. member, our very senior staff are working closely with that person, with the family, and they are receiving support that's exemplary through our services. I would be pleased to discuss this further with you once again if you'd like to. As I said, I know how important this is to you.

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

Distracted Driving Legislation

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the last session Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, was passed but still has not been proclaimed. To the Minister of Transportation: given that this is now the spring of 2011, when is the proposed legislation on distracted driving going to be proclaimed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province's new distracted driving law is the most comprehensive in Canada and will be proclaimed in the coming months. There are several steps that must be completed before this law will take effect and the police can start enforcing it. These tasks include updating related regulations, developing and installing highway signage, and, very importantly, educating Albertans. It is coming soon, so stay tuned.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that there's been widespread public support for this present legislation for several years now, what is the delay in proclaiming the legislation?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there is no delay. We always said that it was going to be mid-2011, and that's still the plan. The new law is about safety, and Alberta is leading the way. We look forward to implementing this new legislation soon. I know that this new law is supported by our traffic safety partners and many Albertans, and together we will make the roads safer.

Mr. Allred: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that when the legislation was introduced, you spoke about a public education program on distracted driving, what has been done to educate the public on the implementation of the penalties for distracted driving?

Mr. Ouellette: We have excellent information on the Alberta Transportation website, and many Albertans are visiting the site, Mr. Speaker. Also, we have had many e-mails and letters looking for information. As he said, that's great. In the coming weeks the province will have an education awareness campaign to help everyone understand the details of that new legislation and what is permitted and how to comply with it. The awareness campaign will . . .

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

Auditor General Recommendations on IT Services

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's most recent report has a list of 19 outstanding recommendations for Service Alberta, most of them to do with IT services. Some of them are identified as key recommendations, and some are six years old. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why is the minister taking so long to respond to key recommendations, particularly a key recommendation on improving IT services to the rest of the government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta has been working very closely with the Auditor General to ensure that some of the areas that have been raised with respect to IT have been put in place. One of the things we have completed is the chief information officers across all the departments and the chief information officer residing in Service Alberta. We continue to follow through and work with the Auditor General on some of the other recommendations as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of the Treasury Board. In 2010-11 Service Alberta's budget to mine for gold through shared IT services was \$15 million. The forecast was nearly double at \$29 million. How does the Treasury Board justify this kind of speculative budgeting?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have been working over the last years internally with all of the departments and under the great leadership of the Minister of Service Alberta to make sure that the government of Alberta is operating on a common domain. With regard to any of the specific expenditures I'd be happy to get back to the hon. member if he can identify them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: given that Service Alberta is ignoring the Auditor General, is unable to control the cost of services to the government, and overspent on its technology services by 30 per cent last year, does the Treasury Board need to offer more discipline to this ministry?

2:40

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I will have to go reread that section of the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General gave us a lot of help in moving forward to make sure we had secure sites, that

we were providing the right amount of protection, balancing our operational costs, and we've done a very good job of that. We simply have spent more time making it better than we have clearing up the old recommendations so they could be reaudited and removed from the Auditor's report. We have committed to work with the Auditor this year to review as much as possible all of the existing recommendations and clear them off the books.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today. There were 108 questions and responses.

We'll continue with the Routine momentarily, but at the moment might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 54 grade 6 students from Norwood elementary school in Wetaskiwin as well as their teachers and parents. The teachers are Ms Melissa Jones, Mrs. Marcie Hofbauer, and teaching assistant Mrs. Marlene Richards. The parents are Mrs. Louiza De Wet, Mrs. Glenda Courtney, and Mrs. Shauna Satre as well as Mr. Gordon Watt. These bright, young future leaders have come up today to watch the Legislature in action. I'm really pleased they could be here, and I want to congratulate their teachers and parents for making this happen. I'd ask that they all stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be chastised today. First, I forgot Les's birthday, and then I forgot to recognize another of their friends with them. Ms Gail Homeniuk is sitting beside the Stelmachs, and I would ask if she would please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: We'll continue now with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Right and Responsibility to Vote

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's an old curse that says: may you live in interesting times. I think we do. The federal election is six days away. Certainly nobody in the chattering classes expected when the campaign started that the polls would show what they are now showing. Whether it delights you or terrifies you or anything in between, it appears that change is in the air, at least in terms who the polls show might end up as the Official Opposition federally or not.

While the polls are showing a clear shift in voter intentions, which may or may not hold up on election day, what they aren't showing us yet is whether that's just a shift in the intentions of the people who voted the last time out. There's no clear indication yet that those who didn't vote in the last federal election are any more likely to vote in this one. Maybe they will. It happened in the last municipal election in Calgary, and it happened there because mayoralty candidate Naheed Nenshi was able to make a sizable

chunk of disengaged voters care about politics, enough of them, in fact, that he is now the mayor.

There's talk, Mr. Speaker, of making it mandatory to vote in Canada or of lowering the voting age to 16 so that we can coerce the kids into democratic participation while still in school. Interestingly, the kids, college-age voters in this case, were on MuchMusic last night in a sort of televised town hall meeting, and some of them were making the point that in this campaign, even when the politicians make promises that are relevant to their lives like around the cost of postsecondary education, they do so in a way that speaks not to them but to their parents, many of whom don't vote either.

I stand today in this Assembly to urge all members to encourage their constituents to vote next Monday, but I know that people who don't vote aren't going to vote until and unless someone allows them to see that their votes do count by making politics relevant to them. It may be the democratic duty of our citizens to vote, but it's our responsibility to give them a reason to care to vote, and on that count we can all try harder.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Spruce Grove Saints Hockey Team

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand today and speak to the Assembly about a focal component of the Spruce Grove sports community, the Spruce Grove Saints junior A hockey team. In a province where hockey is a topic of year-round discussion, the Saints have been a coveted institution and subject of sports conversations for decades.

The Saints are the only surviving franchise still playing from the Alberta Junior Hockey League's inception in 1963. They've played in a number of locations, but collectively these teams have taken home seven AJHL championships, a Centennial Cup, and a western Canadian championship. Now that the Saints have settled back in Spruce Grove, they are doing what they do best, winning hockey games. As season ticket holders my wife and I have watched through this last season and the season before the Saints fight hard and take home two consecutive AJHL championships, the Enerflex Cup, a tremendous accomplishment, Mr. Speaker.

While many were relaxing over this long Easter weekend, the Saints were locked in a repeat battle of last year's Doyle Cup championship with the Vernon Vipers. However, both of these series ended with a Vipers victory in game 7 despite the tireless efforts of the Saints. Mayor Houston of Spruce Grove and I watched a great game on Sunday evening played by both teams.

This fantastic season has not come without the hard work and skills of great athletes over the years. More than 50 players have come out of the Saints' program to play in the NHL, including Stu Barnes, Mike Comrie, Fernando Pisani, and NHL hall of famer Mark Messier.

In addition to their efforts on the ice, the Saints are very active in the community. Speaking to local school classrooms and assemblies about the importance of education is just one of the ways the Saints are positively impacting my constituents. From annual city games with local youth to supporting special-needs citizens, the Saints' participation never goes unnoticed nor unappreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the members of the Assembly join me in recognizing the Saints' outstanding dedication to the game of hockey as well as their dedication to our community.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following bills proceed in the Assembly: Bill Pr. 1, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties Amendment Act, 2011; Bill Pr. 2, Galt Scholarship Fund Transfer Act; Bill Pr. 7, Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2011.

The committee recommends that the following bills not proceed: Bill Pr. 3, Auburn Bay Residents Association Tax Exemption Act; Bill Pr. 4, Cranston Residents Association Tax Exemption Act; Bill Pr. 5, New Brighton Residents Association Tax Exemption Act; and Bill Pr. 6, Tuscany Residents Association Tax Exemption Act.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Would all members in the Assembly who choose to concur please say aye?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you have a petition?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I have a petition signed by 259 individuals from Sherwood Park, Beaumont, Edmonton, Devon, Fort Saskatchewan, and Ardrossan, to name a few of the communities. This petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to initiate an independent, judge-led inquiry under the Public Inquiries Act to investigate the issue of intimidation of health care professionals in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to give oral notice of a motion.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011, is resumed, not more than five hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: I have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness down. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, on his behalf I am pleased to table the requisite number of copies of the following annual report, the 2010 Alberta College of Social Workers annual report.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The people whose names I am about to read do not share the minister of sustainable resources' enthusiasm for either water or habitat protection in the Castle-Crown. They are as follows: Joe Ward, Rosamund Downing, Janet Jamerson, Sofie van Veen, Jane Lewis, Gina Capra, Wes Bailey, Martha Milne, Carol Jurczewski, Ana Rudolph, Kate Kenner, Jessie Rosenthal, Bruce Donnell, Ronda O'Bryant, Paul Goris, Phyl Morello, Lisa Banik, Jared Cornelia, Sarah Stewart, Karen Linarez, Mark Giese, Jdoy Newman, Robert Handelsman, William Lee Kohler, and Carol Collins.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:50

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition I have two tablings. One of them is a tabling from the Canadian Association of University Teachers re the culture of mistrust and fear at the University of Alberta's medical school.

The second one is a quote from former Conservative minister Ernie Isley on the culture of fear and intimidation within the Tories.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter I received from the President of the Treasury Board. I appreciate the information. It's a letter that I received on April 11, and it's a response to questions I had regarding the supplementary retirement plan for public service managers.

The second tabling I have is a letter that our constituency office wrote on April 19, 2011. It is seeking information regarding the closure of the Grey Nuns community hospital's therapeutic warm-water pool. We're still awaiting an answer.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 14 reports from long-term care workers collected by the Alberta union of public employees indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These reports indicate that residents were left in bed, were not returned to bed on time, and didn't receive their baths.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling two letters today. The first is from a constituent of mine, Mr. Ryan Robertson, who is in my office every couple of weeks advocating for an increase in AISH. In this letter he goes through his difficulties living on the \$1,188 he gets a month and what he pays for rent accordingly.

I also have another letter I'd like to table, from Mr. Roger Gagne to the Minister of Energy in regard to his concerns about transmission plans for Alberta. He is also part of a group called Citizens Advocating the Use of Sustainable Energy.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have nine tablings. The first is Alberta Health Legislation: Moving Forward, phase 1, which is about building public confidence. Phase 2 is about private insurance and doctors working in and outside of the public health system, which is really the Americanization of the health system.

The second document is Alberta Health Act: Timing and Process Map. This is a document not viewed by anybody in government caucus, but it's the minister's document outlining the timelines for phase 1 and phase 2 implementation of the privatization document.

The third document. I had asked the minister a question last session, and his answer was that he didn't know which meeting I was talking about. It's an e-mail showing the timelines for that particular meeting on, I believe, July 2.

The fourth tabling is a tabling of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health's progress in implementation of recommendations, the 44 recommendations from the Mazankowski report, the recommendations that have been acted on and those that haven't.

The next five tablings are pertaining to performance of our health care system in expenditures. The first one is on historical expenditure, the two big expenditures, which are health care and education. Health care spending has gone up almost at a 55-degree angle, with education spending being cut.

The second tabling is the number of ALC bed days, alternate level of care days, that seniors are spending in acute-care facilities in Calgary. That number has gone up about a 55-degree angle as well since 2006.

This one, the third tabling, is about the health care system measures from triage to discharge at the 95th percentile for patients admitted to acute-care facilities in the Capital health region from 2006 to 2010. The international standard is four hours, our goal is eight hours, yet we're accomplishing this from 55 to 70 hours over the last three, four years in Alberta.

The fourth document is from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, health data, 2010. It's figure 44, private-sector health expenditure per capita in U.S. dollars in 26 selected countries. The U.S. is number 1, Switzerland is number 2, Canada is already number 3, yet we are not amongst the best health care systems on the planet. The better systems spend less in private health care spending.

The last tabling is from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, a national health expenditure database. It's about private health insurance expenditure per capita, which has grown more rapidly than other sources of finance from household insurance to private insurance and nonconsumption as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Appropriation Act, 2011

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board and minister of finance.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Briefly speaking to the appropriation, Bill 17, as a former teacher I have grave concerns about what is happening with the Education budget this year. The Minister of Education has basically met contractual obligations with regard to increases that were negotiated, weekly income being the determinant factor for teachers, support staff, and also custodial staff. Beyond that, the budget is very weak. The minister has explained that he felt bad with regard, for example, to cutting AISL, the initiatives program, in half, but sorrow is not sufficient. What these programs need is funding. The Education minister also expressed concern over the ongoing freezing of special-needs funding. Also, to his credit, he expressed regret over the enhanced funding for English as a second language students.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the minister had regrets, but what I would like is a stronger commitment from not only this minister but other ministers to protect at all costs the service ministries such as Education, such as health care, such as Children and Youth Services. That, clearly, has not been done in the case of Education, where the minister has got out his calculator and looked at the bank accounts for school boards across the province and has come up with the figure of approximately \$500 million in surplus and reserve funds. He has encouraged the boards to follow the government's example; that is, if necessary, run deficits. Though Premier Klein suggested that that would never happen under his watch, the idea of running deficits has occurred.

Now, a concern I have is with the minister and other ministers claiming that this was a tough year and that we're experiencing a recession, conveniently ignoring the fact that the price of conventional oil as well as the price of bitumen have increased dramatically. Yes, I understand, Mr. Speaker, that there are other considerations such as our Canadian dollar, when we sell our goods to foreign countries, being higher than our main trading partner's, the States. But surely the point of the stability fund or the sustainability fund is to make sure that programs aren't subject to the ups and downs, the whims of externally set prices for non-renewable commodities such as oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, the idea of being penny-wise and pound-foolish, of continuing to use the price of a barrel of oil to determine the funding for Education, Children and Youth Services, or for health care, is a very flawed system. Other provinces, that don't have the nonrenewable resource wealth that we have, still manage to provide top-notch social programs for their citizens. We need to re-evaluate our progressive tax system, which basically allows \$5 billion to go uncollected each year. This is at the expense of the social programs. So I have that concern.

3:00

Another concern I have is with regard to the amount of money that we're spending on health care. It's not the money, Mr. Speaker, but it's the management that's the problem. When we're keeping approximately 800 seniors in acute-care beds at a cost of \$2,000 a day, that does not make sense in dollars or sense in terms of doing the best for those seniors, many of whom should be placed in long-term care. So in the case of health care it's the manner in which the five years of supposedly sustainable funding is allocated.

It is frequently said that health care increases are going out of control and taking up approximately 40 per cent of our budget, Mr. Speaker, but as a portion of GDP they have yet to exceed 7 per cent. But it's not just the amount that's spent; it's how it's spent. As I say, keeping seniors in their homes as long as they possibly can be, making sure they're in the appropriate care facili-

ties, long-term care as opposed to being nickelled and dimed in assisted care facilities, is extremely important.

The need to invest in our advanced education system is an equally important follow-up to that of our public education system. The fact that the previous minister of advanced education indicated that costs would be kept at inflation but then allowed the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta to significantly raise their tuition costs because the government didn't provide the funding is a concern of mine. Another concern I have, Mr. Speaker, is the government allowing institutions to create institutional fees that have no direct bearing on their educational outcomes. These are the facility fees, approximately \$500 for both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate in this province to be able to have our nonrenewable resource wealth. But the extra givebacks that we have for industry: we earn the money and improve land lease sales, we create a very entrepreneurial, competitive circumstance, and then we return large portions of the money we've received back to the companies. It's time for the companies to have long-term investments in the quality of life of Alberta citizens, whether that's endowment funds to a larger extent to innovation funding at the postsecondary institutions, whether it's paying for chairs at the various institutions for undertaking studies that will benefit the industry directly and Albertans as a result. It's extremely important.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, somewhere between \$7 billion and \$11 billion remain in our sustainability fund. Far be it from me to suggest that we burn through that money, but I would say that strategic investments in our social services – education, health care, seniors, children and youth services – would be a good, ongoing, sustainable recommendation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to debate the appropriation, Bill 17.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if I'm pleased or not to speak on Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011, but I would like to actually make some comments if I can, please. I'm one of those MLAs that have been around the Legislature for some time. I got elected in 1993 and chose to run because I liked what Premier Klein had to offer when he spoke about the deficit and paying down our debt, the deficit elimination, and the thought of providing a future for our grandchildren at that particular time.

I am somewhat like he is. He's been quoted previously in the paper that during that time period there wasn't a day that went by that at some point in time we didn't have a process. Not an easy time, actually, for a first-time MLA, who came into this Legislature thinking that life was good and that it was going to be a fairly easy transition from the business world into becoming a politician. I soon learned otherwise, what it was like to be receiving hundreds and hundreds of phone calls from angry people right across this province when we started to attack the deficit.

I remember one time walking into Government House and being surrounded by people that were protesting outside the Legislature. In my mind, it was quite frightening, for that matter, because they were very, very angry and didn't like what the government had done. But we had a goal, and we had a plan. I know, Mr. Speaker, you were there with us at that particular time, as were some of the other people still in this Legislature. We had a plan, and we wanted to provide Albertans with the opportunity down the road to be able to say that they had been part and parcel of this huge plan and wanted to get our debt under control.

I also remember standing in Calgary with Premier Klein at that particular time when we unveiled that we had paid this off. We had this huge announcement, and I was very, very proud to be part of that.

We fast-forward to 2011, and here we are with five years of spending that, in my mind, has not been planned very well. I happened to be a member of government at that time, so I'll take the responsibility of that. I actually was a minister in that period of time for a little bit, before the new Premier came onside, and it just kind of went from bad to worse. We had some good times in that particular time, where, in my mind, when oil and gas was good and everybody was working in this province, quite frankly, we spent like drunken sailors.

Mr. Speaker, I came from a family where my dad taught me that you don't spend what you don't have. I came from a family that didn't have a lot of means. We were the last people on the block to get a TV, and there was great excitement in our house when we happened to have that. So you come from that era. We have based our whole married life on not spending what we don't have, and again we were the last people on the block when we got a VCR. We probably wouldn't have been buying that VCR except that my son was a Cub and ended up winning that, so it was a bonus for us.

I look at a clear act that we had in place under the leadership of Premier Klein, and that was the Deficit Elimination Act. That act is gone now, never to be found. I was very proud that we had that act in place. It was very clearly articulated what we could spend, what we couldn't spend. We had a law in this province in regard to the Deficit Elimination Act.

3:10

I look at the budget now and go through some of the expenses and capital investments and nonbudgetary disbursements that we're putting out. As a member of the Wildrose I have five critic positions that keep me busy, health being one of them. When we voted on this, I voted against this, probably one of the main reasons being that – one of the things that we do when we're discussing the budgetary items is have the privilege of asking the minister questions in regard to the budget. Through the five critic positions that I have – we only have 10 minutes, so we try and get the questions out that we think are a priority to Albertans and which Albertans have told us are a priority.

In those questions and sometimes answers that we get from the government, we've also articulated that we'd like to have our questions answered by written response. It's towards the end of April, and from not one of the ministries that I'm responsible for, which are Health, Seniors, Solicitor General, Service Alberta, and Employment and Immigration, have we received any responses in regard to some of the expenditures that we've questioned them about.

We know as members of the opposition that this budget is going to pass. I, like the member that just briefly spoke, have some real problems. I think one of the ones that I have is the continuing questions that we ask the government in regard to providing us with the information that we need in regard to long-term care. They continually stand up and they brag about their 1,300 continuing care spaces, and there's nothing wrong with that. I think it's a good goal, and it's a goal for a transition that the government keeps talking about, that when you're in independent living, you move to assisted living, and then your next step is into long-term care. To this date we still haven't had an answer in regard to long-term care.

As the critic I've had the opportunity to talk to many, many seniors and their families, those seniors that are struggling in as-

sisted living when they should be in a long-term care space. They move from the assisted living space back into the hospital, and they sit there, or lay there, I guess, in an acute-care setting until somewhere along the line, unfortunately, a senior will pass away and they fill that one little space available in a long-term care facility. You know, the government can brag all they want in regard to what they're doing for the seniors in this province and what they're doing when they talk about their continuing care plan, but we still haven't got answers in regard to those seniors that are in limbo between assisted living and where they move forward. So it disheartens me that we have such an attitude in regard to how we're treating people, our seniors, in this province.

I'm dealing with that with my mom at this particular time, who was in independent living and now is in assisted living. I look at some of the seniors that she has become friends with in assisted living, watching them as they deteriorate and trying to help them navigate the system. There are those seniors that just need to move from that assisted living. The wonderful people that take care of our seniors in assisted living can't handle these seniors if it's a senior that has dementia and is starting to lash out not only at the staff but their own spouse, you know. The Premier talks about keeping seniors together. Well, you can only do that for so long until you have a senior that becomes violent to their own spouse. I'm dealing with one of those at this particular time, where he doesn't even recognize his wife. He's just violent.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, we would have no problem supporting the budget if we could get the answers that we require. We think there's a lot of spending in this budget that needs to be explained. We think there's waste in this budget that could be utilized by some of the other departments. Children and Youth Services probably could use some extra money, the seniors, so many.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to have on the record that we're realists, and we know that this budget is going to pass. I think it's important that we look at how we're spending, what we're spending on. Is it a want? Is it a need? Or is it something where the government truly has to look at what they're spending on, how they're spending?

I look at the number of ministers across the front bench. I think there are 23. In reality we don't need 23 ministers. We could certainly look at some of the ministries and combine them like we did previously in government under Premier Klein. It's gotten bigger and bigger and bigger. Unfortunately, all we can do as members of the opposition is to continue to hold the government accountable, and we will continue to do that.

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

Is this under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Boutilier: It is.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. My questions are to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I know you made reference to the allocation for infrastructure for seniors, and I know that all members of the Assembly certainly recognize the importance that seniors had in actually building this province. My question – and I know that she like many Albertans is caring for her mom right now – is relative to the fact that commitments were made to help seniors. As you know, one of them was in the riding of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as others. The announcement of funding was for new projects, but the projects that had been previously announced by the government have still not been fulfilled. So my question to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: do you think that is correct and

right relative to commitments that were made that have still not been honoured?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you've got, as the member has indicated – I think he talked about a 103-year-old senior that's been in an acute-care setting for the last three years versus what the cost would be to have that particular individual in a long-term care. You can recoup those costs very easily. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I can tell you the numbers we've crunched, and when you look at it, if you want to talk about a senior in an acute-care bed versus what it would cost for long-term care, you can't compare the numbers.

If the government has made a commitment and said that they're going to provide long-term care facilities, whether it's in Fort McMurray or Carstairs or Calgary, I think that they owe Albertans that commitment because Albertans look to us as a government to honour our commitments. We're held in a manner of trust. They've obviously failed on that commitment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm very aware, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has great concerns for our most vulnerable Albertans, whether they be seniors or children. I'm wondering if the hon. member has concerns about the growing caseloads of Children and Youth Services workers and their ability to provide the important services that they provide for children.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a former Minister of Children and Youth Services I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the staff, that deal with some very, very difficult situations and in very difficult times when they're dealing with children that are coming into the system.

I can tell you, though, in reference to your question earlier in question period, that one of the biggest disappointments I have with this government is that in 2007 I stood in the Legislature as a member of the Conservatives and carried an amendment forward on the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, an extension for children being held, and to this date it still hasn't been honoured. We have children – I'm well aware of the case that he's dealing with. We deal with many, many families that are dealing with children that need to be in secure treatment. I think that's probably another one of the biggest failures of this government: not protecting our children.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member in her remarks indicated that one of the things that could be done in order to spend less money is to streamline the size of cabinet. I'm wondering if the hon. member would agree or disagree that back in 2001 cabinet grew in size. At one particular instance the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General was split so that a new portfolio of Solicitor General could be created out of that in order to allow the political leadership for things to happen; for example, the creation of the sexual offenders registry and other things like that. Was that a bad move to have a political leadership be able to focus on high-priority areas rather than combining it and creating a stronger bureaucratic leadership and less ability to really focus on some of those important agenda items?

3:20

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, this is a good question from the for-

mer Minister of Justice. When he was Minister of Justice, I was the Solicitor General, and we happened to work very well together. His big thing was moving the age of consent from 14 to 16. You didn't have to have a separate ministry at that particular time because, you know, if you have a good minister and he's able to listen to the people . . .

An Hon. Member: Or she.

Mrs. Forsyth: Or she.

. . . that are around him – that's his caucus colleagues – I'm sure this minister would have had no problem bringing forward the high-risk offender registry.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, the time for this section has now left us.

Additional participants in the debate? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate all members' comments up to this point relative to Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011, that has been put forward by the President of the Treasury Board. I would like to speak relative to the bill and some of its detail within. Of course, it lists all of the 23 ministries and the dollar amounts that have been allocated. Again I remind all members that the dollars that have been allocated for this proposed budget are dollars that are obtained from hard-working Albertans, Albertans who pay taxes and who work hard.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Consequently, I am somewhat troubled by some of the details, and I'd like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to express my displeasure in terms of the important issues we need to deal with. As was mentioned earlier, first and foremost, I believe that it is fundamentally wrong to be freezing – freezing – special-needs funding for our children. That is fundamentally wrong. I know there are members in all corners of all political parties that do not accept that. Unfortunately, the government seems to accept that. That is very unfortunate.

The responsibility, as the Member for Calgary-Varsity had mentioned earlier, in terms of protecting at all costs our children that are directly impacted is fundamental. It's a value that all Albertans share. Therefore, witnessing how dollars are being allocated in one ministry and other ministries – the fact that there are 23 ministries, I think, is not something that Albertans can accept today. Albertans have had to tighten their belts when it comes to how the economy is today even though this government continues to be addicted to revenues. The revenues that this government is accepting today in terms of WTI, west Texas intermediate, are over \$100 a barrel and the royalties, yet at the same time they are freezing the funding for special needs for vulnerable young people. That is simply not acceptable. I believe it's not acceptable as a value within Albertans, and I think Albertans will render their verdict on that in the next provincial election.

I also will say that I'm troubled by a government that has announced new expenditures in expense and capital investment but at the same time has failed to honour previous announcements that were made, based on the dollars I see in here for Infrastructure. The point that I would like to arrive at, as I mentioned earlier today, Mr. Speaker, is regarding not only our children but our seniors. Our senior citizens have built this province, and we must treat them with respect. When I speak of respect, I want for a moment to touch base on the dollar allocation that is for Infrastructure. I'm troubled by the government, by the fact that

you made previous commitments, you failed to honour them, you let down your seniors. In the meantime you go out and announce provincial funding – for instance, an example is the provincial museum – of \$365 million for capital investment. At the same time, as a businessperson, no business would ever go and do something else for another customer until they honoured their commitment to the previous customer.

For my voters in Fort McMurray and in other constituencies across Alberta commitments such as those that were made in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to senior citizens have not yet been reached. The commitments that were made have not been fulfilled, yet at the same time the Premier and the government are running out and announcing \$365 million for new infrastructure. They seem to have lost their focus. They have lost their focus and lost their way when it comes to how the dollars are being spent.

Rule 1 in any economy, in any business is that you first honour the commitments you made to your customers. Well, commitments were made, but those commitments have not been fulfilled, yet at the same time the government is rushing out and now making new commitments to others. [interjection] In fact, the Government House Leader, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, is interjecting and heckling. I witnessed on Thursday night his heckling in front of an Albertan talking about the land-use framework. I thought he would have learned that lesson on Thursday night, but I will remind him of that lesson if he needs to be reminded.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm troubled by a government that has announced investment expenditures going into the future but has not honoured the commitments of the past. Our seniors have very proudly built this province. They have built this province, and they deserve better when it comes to infrastructure allocation.

In actual fact, I believe that by taking the Minister of Justice – actually, I was making reference to the Ministry of Justice and the Solicitor General. I like the idea of merging those ministries together.

For instance, the Ministry of Education and, I can say, the ministry of advanced education and the dollars allotted in the Appropriation Act: clearly, in today's economy both those ministries should be merged in a savings to Albertans. Albertans have tightened their belts when it comes to expenditures, and Albertans, with their Albertan values, expect no less from the government pertaining to the Appropriation Act. That is quite simply merging, dating back to 2001. The Government House Leader mentioned that earlier to my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek. I think it's very important.

That was then, and this is now, and Albertans are tightening their belts. We believe that the Appropriation Act, that has been put forward by the President of the Treasury Board, is failing to honour the commitments that have been made by this government in previous years. In fact, we have almost 60 seniors sitting in acute-care beds in Fort McMurray, with a population of 104,000 people. No other city in Alberta that has 104,000 – that's the size of Red Deer, a little bit larger than Lethbridge – presently has no long-term care facility, yet the government and Treasury Board made a commitment over three years ago.

My trouble with this Appropriation Act, Bill 17, that has been put forward by the President of the Treasury Board, is that it is failing to honour the commitments that were made previously. Nowhere is it reflected in terms of taking care of previous commitments, yet I learn and I read about new money for a provincial museum. I understand that even members of the very government party were surprised by it because some didn't share with them where the dollars were being allocated.

I think, clearly, there is trouble in River City when it comes to the allocation of dollars because of the fact that commitments have been made by this government that have not been honoured in the past. In any smart business or public institution you first honour the value of keeping your word rather than rushing out and politically making announcements of new infrastructure projects. As I look at the allocation for Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, clearly, the fact that they're rushing out to spend more money on infrastructure without first honouring the commitments of the past, I believe, is an indictment on this government.

Clearly, in my observation, the Appropriation Act is violating, in my judgment, an important Alberta value. That Alberta value is living within your means and honouring commitments that were made to the very Albertans that built this province with a great degree of integrity and respect.

3:30

Now, in my community, just like in many other constituencies, in a city of 104,000 I have almost 60 senior citizens sitting in acute-care beds in a hospital called the Northern Lights regional hospital in Fort McMurray, where I had the proud honour of being its mayor as well as an alderman and city councillor. As the youngest mayor the commitments were being made even then. I continue to do my job as an MLA to ensure that the appropriations that are associated with honouring our seniors and honouring commitments that were made will be lived up to.

What I observe in here is, again, a loss of focus, a loss of focus because commitments that seem to have been made in the past appear to have been forgotten. Our responsibility as MLAs in this House, Mr. Speaker, is to never, never allow our citizens, our bosses, to be forgotten by government commitments that have been made to the people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and to our seniors.

With those 60 seniors that are in acute-care beds, that is on average costing about \$60,000 a day. On a weekly basis that works out to just under half a million dollars. That's just under \$2 million a month, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, at the end of the year it nears almost \$14 million a year. The government made its commitment to my seniors in Fort McMurray over three years ago. In fact, for the cost a long-term care centre could have been built as opposed to these seniors now, presently, living in acute-care beds at the Fort McMurray regional hospital. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable.

The Appropriation Act, 2011, Bill 17, clearly, in my mind, has demonstrated to me that the Appropriation Act has lost focus in terms of its allocation of honouring commitments of the past rather than running out as politicians and making announcements for the future.

As the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, when I visit Mrs. Mitchell next Monday on her birthday, when she will be celebrating her 103rd birthday, I will proudly be able to look her in the eye and say that I have used every fibre of energy in my body to support her voice for a long-term care centre. That commitment, that was made by this Premier and this government, must be maintained.

Mr. Speaker, it saddens me that the government is running out with the allocations of this Appropriation Act and spending in new areas, literally like drunken sailors, yet we still haven't honoured the commitments that were made almost three years ago.

I want to say that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills also had a commitment that was made by one of the contenders in the leadership that's coming up. Mr. Speaker, with the Appropriation Act once again I know how frustrated he is with the fact that

commitments were made but still have not been fulfilled, yet he is still with the government on that side of the caucus.

Mr. Speaker, when I go and visit some of those 60 senior citizens in acute-care beds at the hospital, I want to proudly be able to look them in the eye and say that what the government has done is not acceptable. The actions speak for themselves. No matter how much heckling or bullying or intimidation I receive or what punitive approaches the government may take, I refuse to sit down. It will be my last breath to continue to fight and honour these very senior citizens that built this province and built this province with respect and integrity. That's something that I think, that because of the nonactions of this government, with not so much as a shovel in the ground in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo riding, not so much as a piece of land even bought in terms of honouring a commitment that was made three years ago, in my community of 104,000 people our seniors, over 60 of them, sit without any long-term care facility, which costs the government and the minister of health \$60,000 a day.

We can clearly – clearly – be more fiscally prudent in the dollar allocation by having better use of our dollars as opposed to how this government has displayed and lost its way in terms of its focus on previous commitments. Mr. Speaker, I say to this government and under the Appropriation Act: honour your commitments from three years ago; do the right thing so that you can look at yourself in the mirror. I can look at myself in the mirror.

When I talk to Mrs. Mitchell when she celebrates her 103rd birthday on election day, May 2, and when I speak to Olive Woodward, who, in fact, on June 4 will turn 100 years old, as they continue to be in acute-care beds, I'm going to be able to say that I've done my level best to get what had been committed to and promised by this government over three years ago.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's much more needing to be said about this government revisiting its Appropriation Act. Looking at the infrastructure of new announcements yet failing to honour commitments of the past is simply not acceptable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to say that I think that it is entirely appropriate for each member of this Assembly to honour our seniors, especially for what they've given to us here in Alberta, the opportunities and, of course, the challenges that come with our expanding economy.

I would like to ask the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo if he is aware that Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors' benefits in the country, that the thresholds for direct financial assistance are the highest in the country, and so are the maximum monthly payments. I wonder if he knows that my ministry remains committed to assisting those seniors most in need, that there are 405,000 seniors in Alberta and that 148,000 receive Alberta seniors' benefit, and that in the Appropriation Act this year the government will provide almost \$426 million to seniors through income supplements and assistance with expenses like dental work, eyeglasses, and education property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about continuing care because it's a commitment of this government to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations. It's a top priority for me and for this government. Before I go any further, I'd like to say that we have provided for the area of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. In fact, we had a request for a proposal, and we've approved 88 beds to go into the Dids-

bury area. We're close to having that ground being broken by the organization that was chosen in the bid, and that was the Bethany Care association. They will be having their continuing care facility built very shortly.

Now, I would also like to comment that I wonder if the member is aware that in the 2011-12 Appropriation Act \$75 million has been approved for capital funding for the affordable supportive living initiatives to assist in the development and upgrading of close to 600 more new affordable supportive living spaces and that since 1999 the province has invested over half a billion dollars in capital grant funding to help build and modernize over 10,000 affordable supportive living spaces, that we have 6,000 of those 10,000 built and 4,000 in progress at this time, as I speak. I wonder if the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo knows that we have 723 licensed supportive living facilities, that we have 29,000 clients in supportive living, that there are 14,800 who receive long-term care services in 174 facilities, and that 107,000 Albertans receive home care.

Mr. Speaker, I think that there is quite a bit of funding for continuing care and for our seniors in the Appropriation Act. I just wonder if the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is aware of the funding that we are providing for our seniors, once again among the very highest in the entire country.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. God love the minister of seniors, the Member for Red Deer-North, for the work she tries to do. It's unfortunate, though, that sometimes she loses her votes at the cabinet table in fighting for seniors. I think this Appropriation Act, clearly, is an example of her loss fighting at the cabinet table for that, based on what it is I am witnessing.

It is clear to me that the hon. member poses a question in terms of expenditure. It's not a question of how much money you spend. It's about: are we getting value? In answer to her question, Mr. Speaker, what I'm troubled by specifically is: does the member think it's okay for the Premier to rush out and make an announcement of \$365 million, when it wasn't discussed at cabinet or caucus, to be a legacy for him, yet he has failed, failed miserably, to honour commitments to our seniors, who built this very province, from three years ago? Commitments were made, yet we have over 60 seniors sitting in acute-care beds. Does the minister of seniors think that it is acceptable for seniors such as Mrs. Mitchell, who is turning 103, and Olive Woodward, who is turning a hundred years old, that commitments her government made over three years ago have not been honoured?

3:40

I'm glad to that see they're potentially going to break the ground in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Well, guess what? They haven't even come close to breaking ground in Fort McMurray because they don't have any land. This minister has said to me in the past that we have to find land, so I find her comments very ironic, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to join the debate on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Nottley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in this occasionally animated debate around the Appropriation Act, 2011, Bill 17.

I'd like to start simply, I guess, by reiterating my agreement with some of the comments that have been made by previous speakers. Just generally speaking, I know it's a comment that's made every year, but it does warrant repetition – it is really quite

significant – in that the amount of time that members of this Assembly are given to engage in debate on this roughly \$34 billion budget is paltry. I would suggest that it really amounts to an insult to the taxpayers of Alberta because it truly is just a process of going through the motions by this government and that they truly aren't concerned about providing for a quality of debate that allows for true accountability.

I think I've mentioned before, in the past, my experience working in other jurisdictions, where estimates debates go until the opposition stops having questions. One of the neat things about that process is that it compels the government to actually answer the questions that they are asked by the opposition when engaged in debate. Instead, we have this ridiculous process here, where we get, you know, three hours for a budget that's worth a few million and three hours for budget that's worth \$15 billion, which is absolutely contradictory to any kind of rational approach to this process, any kind of approach that's actually vested in a desire to provide accountability and transparency and good governance for the people of the province. We don't do that here.

On top of that, we have such limited time within which we can ask a minister for information. Some ministers are quite good at being fairly rational and brief and responsive in the questions that they get from opposition members during that very, very brief time where they're asked to talk about their budget to the opposition and answer questions. But many ministers have taken to using that brief period of time and saying, you know, that not only is it enough that we only have to answer to the public for our multibillion-dollar budget for three hours but that when we do do that, we're going to ensure that we engage in long, superfluous, vague discussions about things that have nothing to do with what they're being asked by opposition members in order to simply take up time and delay that brief amount of time that members of this Assembly actually get in order to address these issues.

We then have taken to asking specific questions of ministers, saying: "You know what? If you don't get to this by the end of your long, superfluous, self-congratulatory statements, could you please specifically write to us with answers to these questions?" As has already been stated, we haven't had any of those answers provided to us yet.

Now we're being asked to vote on a \$34 billion budget, where the majority of ministers haven't bothered to respond to the specific questions that were made by members of this Assembly. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it amounts to I won't say a breach of privilege but certainly a thumbing of the nose at the privilege of each and every member of this Assembly in terms of our ability to actually do our job when ministers simply don't bother to answer the questions that they have been asked when we are having budget debate and when members of the opposition, in particular, are asking this government why it is that they believe we should vote in favour of a particular budget, that could be up to billions and billions of dollars.

It's profoundly disrespectful, again, not only to members of the opposition but to all people in this province. I really have to, as I said, reinforce that point, that has been made by previous members, because it really is a dysfunctional process, and it's one that's born out of 40 years of the same government and a level of arrogance which is unmatched anywhere else in this country.

Having said that, I'll start by saying that previous members have talked about, "Oh, you don't spend what you don't have" and all that kind of stuff, so we should therefore be very careful about what we spend and probably spend less. As you probably are aware, Mr. Speaker, our party and our caucus is the only caucus, really, in the Legislature right now that believes that this government is actually in the process – it's probably about 20 years into a

process that will go on for maybe another 20 years – of selling down the river generations' and generations' worth of resources for this province to primarily multinational oil companies for a song and failing to collect the fair share of Albertans' wealth that is owed to them because we are owners of the resources in this province.

By failing to do that, we then create this false sense of: oh, we don't have enough money, so we've got to lay off teachers here, and we've got to make social workers manage 30 foster families instead of 20 foster families. We've got to do all these things which are bad for Albertans and bad for their future because we don't apparently have enough money even though in this particular jurisdiction of Alberta we are sitting on an amount of wealth which is unprecedented in any other developed world jurisdiction.

Frankly, a goat could walk in and manage this government's finances with those kinds of resources at their disposal, but I'm not sure that a goat could actually manage to kick it out the door as fast as this government without getting any kind of resources returned for the people of this province, not only for the people now but for the people in the future because, of course, this resource is not going to be here forever, and we all know that. We need to develop it responsibly in a way that we can create a province and a framework and a foundation that will serve not only this generation but generations to come.

But that's not the vision of this government. This government's vision is to kick it out the door as fast as you can and get whatever little crumbs from the table that you're offered and ask or demand nothing on behalf of the people of Alberta. As a result, we're in a situation where we have ministers saying: well, you know, it's a financial crunch, and people are going to have to pay the price.

Where are people paying the price in this province? Well, we're paying the price in terms of the postsecondary education of young Albertans. We're asking our young Albertans to take on more debt. We're asking them to go further through university and come out of university with more debt than we ever have before. We're asking them to pay more to go to university, and we're basically saying that only those young Albertans from middle- and upper-class, wealthy families will be allowed to enjoy the benefits of our postsecondary education system. We're decreasing access as we go.

What else are we doing? Well, we've talked about children's services, the fact that caseloads for social workers are continuing to go through the roof, that social workers are no longer social workers; they're actually case managers. They don't actually meet with the families and the kids that they're trying to be providing support to. Instead we download it onto contractors, who then have somebody else with half the training do it for half the money. The social workers are trying to manage this debacle, and as that happens, we have more and more instances of our collective failure in what is probably the wealthiest jurisdiction in the world to ameliorate child poverty. We fail every day in this province. If we can't deal with it with the amount of wealth at our disposal, who can? I, frankly, am not prepared to accept that it's a problem that can't be fixed. I think it can be, but this government has given up on it. They've just fundamentally given up on it.

What else have we done? Well, we've talked already about education. We're looking at a situation where we're going to be laying off teachers, where class sizes are going to be bigger, where we're going to be closing schools. I had an animated debate with the Minister of Education, during my very brief little 10-minute window of being able to talk to him about his budget, about the plans for special-needs education in this province. We have frozen funding to account for special-needs kids in our education system for four years now – four years – in this province. With the

amount of wealth produced and taken out of this province every single, solitary day, we've spent four years not increasing funding for special-needs kids in our education system. Really, is this something to be proud of? I don't think so.

3:50

What else have we done? Well, Employment and Immigration: every day we hear the Minister of Employment and Immigration in photo ops go out to whatever media scrum he can find and talk about his new ministry, and one of the things he likes to talk about is that we don't have enough workers in this province. Well, what do we need to do? We need to increase immigration, and we need to bring more people to this province permanently, not temporarily but permanently. But at the same time that we're talking through our hat, shall we say, on that particular issue, we're cutting funding to immigrant services. We're cutting funding to the very services that would ensure that new Canadians are able to integrate productively and effectively into our communities. Is this future-forward thinking? No, it's not. It's the kind of thinking that comes from a government that's been in power far too long and has lost all sense of how to plan for next week let alone years down the road.

We have an Employment and Immigration budget as well that once again significantly underestimates the resources that are going to be necessary to deal with those living in the most and the greatest of poverty. They do that every year. Of course, I think that in the process of that they develop a systemic process to kick people off this kind of income support.

One of the things that happens in a Conservative-led economy is that when the economy does recover, typically those at the very bottom of the economy, those who are most in need, who are most suffering from poverty, don't typically recover with the economy. Certainly, that happens if you don't take steps to avoid that outcome. Nobody is doing that here, so there's no reason to believe that our obligations with respect to income support are going to go down. Yet, once again, the government is planning for it, and once again, I'm sure, we'll be asked in supplementary estimates to approve more money. I don't know why it is that we plan that way.

The environment: this ministry is probably the single biggest fundamental failure that I have observed in this government since I have been elected, nothing but vague platitudes while we essentially hand the keys over to industry and ask them to monitor themselves. Initially my sense was, you know, that we had a minister with sort of good intentions, who really thought some of this stuff was happening. But then I looked back. He made assurances to Albertans that we were doing tests, that we had the science, that we had every reason to believe, in our expert opinion, that we weren't contaminating the Athabasca River, that we weren't contaminating soil in and around oil wells, that we weren't jeopardizing air quality in and around Fort McMurray. He said, you know: "Don't you trust us? We're doing the work."

Well, then, finally, thanks to third-party people who just knew enough to know that this wasn't true, we find out that, in fact, it wasn't true. It's not just a difference in opinion, Mr. Speaker. It's not. When the story finally came out, it became clear that the minister had no evidence upon which to suggest that we knew the answer to these questions that people were raising to him.

He effectively misled Albertans time and time again, saying: "We've got the testing. It's safe. Trust us. It's all right. Don't worry." Well, no, we didn't have the testing. We weren't doing the testing. We weren't doing the right testing. We weren't doing enough testing. We don't have the equipment to do the testing. We don't even have the scientists who know what needs to be tested. Yet all the time, knowing that to be the case, the Minister of Envi-

ronment said: "Oh, you guys are all just a bunch of silly alarmists. Trust me. We know it's safe. It's okay." Well, frankly, he should have had to lose his job for misleading Albertans like that for so long.

In the meantime he comes in here with a budget that we're being asked to vote on today, which is yet another cut to his ministry. So we will off-load even more monitoring, compliance, protection of our health, and protection of our environmental safety to industry to tell us, when and if they decide to, that they're keeping us safe. We won't check it, we won't monitor it, and we won't audit it because we're cutting back in that ministry at the very same time that we're budgeting to increase economic and industrial activity in this province.

Essentially this government has said, "We don't care about the environment. It's all about what PR we can create and ship out of the province whenever the going gets a little tough and people turn a little bit too much attention to us, but we aren't actually doing the job." This budget is a clear indication that we're not doing the job, that we haven't done the job, that we don't care about doing the job, and that we have every intention of going forward without doing the job.

It's all guns blazing. Bring industry in. Grow, grow, grow. But do not ask us to test whether we're doing it safely. Do not ask us to make sure the water is clean. Do not ask us to make sure that the air quality is clean. Do not ask us to find out whether the wells are being cleaned up or whether we have enough security for the clear environmental degradation that's under way right now. Don't ask us to do this because we don't have the resources to give you an answer, and we don't care. That's what's in this budget. That's what this government has decided to do.

Seniors: we've spent a lot of time talking about seniors already, but I will say this. In essence there are two fundamental failures when it comes to our planning for seniors. First of all, this government continues to intentionally mislead people by talking about continuing care when we talk about long-term care.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and wondered if she would like to expound on the following topics. You might want to tell us a little bit more about the amount of time allotted for budget debates. I'm frustrated as a member of the Official Opposition with 30 minutes to discuss multibillion dollar budgets. You have to try and hit the heights within a 10-minute time frame, so I'd be interested in your concerns there and also in the timing and the scheduling of the debate, after a full day's scheduling in the Legislature then having to come back for three hours in the evening, the humanity of the process.

Also, with regard to labour issues you briefly touched on the need to have more individuals in the provincial nominee program as compared to the temporary foreign worker programs that provide no rights. You referenced the concerns over cutting of English language support, and you touched on a concern that we both share, and that's the Minister of Employment and Immigration sitting on a two-bit minimum wage increase. Those are topics. Feel free to expand.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to do that. I think I'll focus first just in terms of the amount of time that we have for debate. For instance, I was just talking about seniors, and there are concerns that I have around the seniors' ministry and the fact that we didn't get an opportunity to fully talk about that

because we have a government that intentionally talks about continuing care when doctors and experts and people that wrote your election promises talked about long-term care. Then they turn around and talk about continuing care, and we all know that it's a different thing. We have the government saying: oh, we're not going to meet our election promise, but we're going to build continuing care instead. Yet continuing care means so many different things, and it's intentionally misleading and confusing to Albertans. That's the first problem.

The second problem is that even if you assume for the moment that continuing care is actually what Albertans need and that all those experts who say that we actually have a tremendous backlog of people who are sitting in hospitals for year after year after year because they can't get access to proper long-term care – even if you say that that's not the case and that continuing care and privately funded assisted living is what we need, even if that's the case, this government is still planning to be 9,000 or 10,000 spaces short based on their own demographic planning 10 years from now. So they're planning for a crisis.

In the meantime we're not putting any kind of significant investment in building the sort of home care that would be required to keep people from getting increasingly ill and having horrible experiences while stuck in their homes because they're unable to get the care they need or, alternatively, end up in our hospitals and further enhance that crisis. That's the kind of thing that we need to discuss in much more detail, and we don't get that time in terms of the budget time that we have.

The member talks about the Minister of Employment and Immigration, and he raises a very good point. If there was adequate funding, presumably in that minister's budget, he would be able to hire what is apparently the 20 people required to read a four-page report in order to come to a decision on whether to stop freezing the minimum wage in Alberta. Of course, we're on target right now to once again return to having the lowest minimum wage in the country. I believe we are right now the second lowest in the country, based on increases that other provinces are making.

4:00

Of course, an all-party committee recommended to the minister several months ago, back in September or October, that the freeze be lifted and that we start having regular increases. Here we are six months later. Every time we ask the minister, he says: oh, I'm reviewing the report. I swear to God that I don't what they need – if they need interpreters, if they need software that will blow up the report so that the minister can read it – how it can possibly take him six months to read a four-page report. It's really quite mind boggling. Yet at the same time we have tens of thousands of Albertans who are being asked to live on a sum which is clearly designed to ensure that they continue to live in poverty and that their kids continue to live in poverty. We are the most wealthy province in the country, yet we insist on ensuring that we have no protection for our lowest income earners.

One of the other recommendations in that report was that we put together an antipoverty task force or an antipoverty plan. Again, we've heard nothing about this from this government. Very unfortunate.

The Acting Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few comments. One of the things that I've been hearing is: are we getting value for money? I think I would like a definition because clearly my definition of value for money is probably different than other people that are sitting in this Legislature.

What I hear about is all of the millions and millions of dollars that are being thrown at this and thrown at that, but what I don't really hear about is what the real outcomes are. We speak about, particularly on the seniors side, beds and homes and rooms and all kinds of accommodations, and that's the bricks and the mortar. Bricks and mortar make money. What doesn't make money is the care. That's the part that isn't being addressed.

You can have all of the continuing care beds in the world, and you can say that you're spending millions and millions of dollars and that you've got X number of beds, but the question still is: are you really getting value for your money? And is the outcome people, seniors – and not just seniors. These are people who can be brain injured. These are people who can have MS and who are young and don't necessarily want to be in a group home or, in fact, perhaps a long-term care facility where they don't really fit.

So where is the value? What is the outcome? Do we really have people that are truly being cared for where they should be being cared for? The answer, of course, is no. The different classifications that we have, long-term care and continuing care – and under continuing care, of course, there are other classifications, but long-term care truly is a skill level on its own. Because of the fact that I'm the critic in this area, I really do hear from people from all over the province who have heart-breaking tales of parents who were not looked after, or uncles and aunts, or in fact from husbands and parents of people who need full-time, long-term care at a very early age.

Home care is great for people with MS, but home care is limited in the fact that people must get out and people must have socialization. Because someone comes into someone's house – and I could use my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. Because someone comes in and helps him in the morning and helps him in the evening, he gets out during the day, and he has a full life. There are many people who could have full lives if they got the care that they needed at the time that they needed it.

We can jump back to seniors. Many, many seniors go from one level to another. In fact, most will before they pass on. The idea of a continuum of care within one building is very, very laudable. However, a lot of the buildings that are being built are for profit. Even if they are not for profit, the rent that people are paying pays for the bricks and the mortar. The care is very expensive.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you going to pull this into the appropriation bill?

Ms Pastoor: I was talking about the fact that we don't have enough money and that instead of always talking about dollars, dollars, dollars, we should be able to put a value on those dollars. How I interpreted value was the outcome for those dollars. We can throw money at everything, but if we don't get good outcomes, then the appropriation bill is not doing what it should be doing. It isn't using money wisely.

One of the other things that I'm certainly concerned about is funding for schools. We have an organization in Lethbridge called 5th on 5th, which has been doing superb work, working with out of school students and helping them. Some go on to get jobs, and some go on to further education. In fact, many have to finish up high school. We have any number of immigrant adults, basically anywhere from 18 to 30, who actually go through 5th on 5th and become taxpaying, responsible citizens for Alberta. Then we have Career Transitions, that look after the children in school and help them transition from school into appropriate jobs that they would like, that they're going to enjoy but really don't understand how they can get there. Sometimes they look at that tunnel, and there's just no light at the end of it.

I think it's very, very short-sighted to have cuts on these particular programs. I think it's very short-sighted because we will pay in the long run. We'll pay in society, in health costs, and certainly in justice. In fact, even worse is that there's a possibility of many, many young people wasting what is their personal potential in, certainly, becoming citizens who are trained and have the confidence to be able to hold jobs that will allow them to raise families and enjoy a lifestyle that Alberta can provide.

One of the other things that I haven't noticed in this appropriation bill is – I know that AISH has received some increases over the last couple of years, but as always I really believe that AISH has to be indexed as our MLAs' salaries. Yes, they have had some raises, but they may not see anything of consequence over the next little while, and they're always in a catch-up position. People who are in a catch-up position aren't – it's difficult for them to be positive. It's difficult for them to see hope. It's difficult for them to be able to really go further.

We always hear the Minister of Health and Wellness saying that there's a five-year sustainability plan, there's five years' worth of dollars for health care. Okay. That's great. But where is the five-year sustainability, the five-year funding plan for people on AISH? I believe that there should be no difference there. People on AISH should know and not have to wait until year's end to find out if, in fact, they will be able to receive any money that would help them even just meet inflation costs.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place. But I do believe that talking about dollars being thrown at something is not talking about the outcome that those dollars should be providing.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I'm pleased to ask the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East some questions. I know her passion in regard to seniors, and of course her previous nursing experience has been extremely helpful when we've had some conversations, sharing their frustration in regard to what's happening on the continuing care model that the government keeps bragging about.

4:10

I'd like to, firstly, ask the member her thoughts on the continuing care model, and if she feels that our seniors are being treated fairly when they're stuck in that model of an assisted living facility when they should be in a long-term care facility. I know one of her frustrations is the fact that it would be nice if we could get any one of the government members to come with us while we visit the facilities so that they can see what kind of seniors are stuck in an assisted living facility or, for that matter, in a hospital, as the member from Fort McMurray has talked about, in an acute-care setting.

I'm starting to get calls from seniors and their families across this province, and the other thing I'd like to ask her about is their frustration with not being able to access home care or, if they are getting home care, not adequate home care.

The last thing, I guess, that I'm getting calls about. The minister from Red Deer-North has talked about the seniors' benefits that they're getting. I don't think anybody is arguing about that. I asked the minister of health a question last week in regard to the seniors' drug plan that they all of a sudden dropped and then they've put back, and he indicated in question period that they were looking at it, or there was going to be a report soon. It's always soon. It reminds me of the KPMG report that was, I think, scheduled to be brought out in October. It's now April, and our

poor people in the disabled community, dealing with disabilities under PDD, are anxiously waiting to hear that report. You know, quite frankly, soon is something in the dictionary that we should try and explain and figure out, what exactly soon is.

If the member could talk to the Assembly in regard to the independent living versus the assisted living versus where the heck they go from there.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for those questions. I think that I'd like to go back to 2005 and the MLA task force. One of the things that came out of that was staffing, staffing, staffing, staffing. Yet within the last 20 minutes I have heard that there was a petition from staff saying how many shifts they've had to work short. Part of that is the problem not only in continuing care and long-term care and all the rest of it, but staffing is absolutely imperative, and each level needs a different kind of staffing. You can't bring someone in, give them a six-week course, and let them loose on a geriatric population. There truly is a different set of skills that have to work with that. Particularly – I could go back to the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo example – our seniors that are sitting in acute settings are being looked after by nurses who are highly capable, but they're acute-care nurses. Many of them don't have that extra geriatric training that you need to be able to look after seniors.

We're hearing about seniors hitting out. We're hearing about seniors who are misbehaving. Well, when I see somebody go into someone's room – they are short-staffed, and they don't have enough money – and they walk into the room, and they take over. They just yank them out of bed and do whatever it is that they have to do. Yes, no wonder we have seniors who are acting out. Wouldn't we all in the same circumstances? And who gets blamed? It's the senior that gets blamed. No, it's untrained staff that is the problem. Anybody that has worked with seniors knows that you have to have time to be able to give them the dignity and to be able to approach them and say: this is what we're going to do. You don't just go in and do it.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak on Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2011. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek started talking about 1993, and that brought back old memories of cutbacks. With those cutbacks we lost hospitals, and there were layoffs. To pay down I believe it was a \$22 billion debt, everybody made big sacrifices. The idea behind paying down the debt was that once the debt was gone, we could live happily ever after.

Then we came out with the Ralph bucks: \$1.4 billion gone just like that, spending like drunken sailors. That was not managing the money properly. Those Ralph bucks: I mean, Alaska does it, but they do it from the income of the trust fund. Here we were using the trust fund money. Had we had income from the fund, we could have given the money away. You know, that could have probably been acceptable but, still, not at that cost. We had I believe 13,000 hospital beds that we dropped down to 7,900, and our population was going up. We still haven't caught up.

We've got a big, big infrastructure deficit, and we haven't caught up from the 1993 cutbacks. We haven't been saving enough. Our heritage trust fund. You know, Mr. Lougheed had the vision to save the money, and he set it up in 1976. The Alaska permanent fund, I believe, and the Norway fund were set up a

long time after we did it. And here our heritage trust fund savings are just still hovering around \$12 billion to \$13 billion. That's what we had back in 1986. I mean, we had about \$150 billion, I believe, that came from royalties. All that money is gone, and we've got nothing to show for it.

Then we had this sustainability fund set up. That was the idea of Mr. Ken Nicol of the Liberal Party. That \$17 billion we keep bragging about, that now we've got the money: I don't know; I think that money is gone, too.

Here we are laying off teachers again. We're laying off social workers. We are doing cutbacks to immigrant services. You know, there's a freeze for funding for special-needs kids. The whole idea to pay down the debt, that \$22 billion debt, was that, you know, we were going to save on the service costs, and then we would be able to manage our economy better.

Had the government been taking into consideration inflation and population growth and had our budgets been going up accordingly, we probably could have been in better shape today than we are now. With a boom coming, everybody keeps talking about the next boom. Is it going to put pressure on our infrastructure? Is it going to put pressure on schools? Is it going to put pressure on hospitals, pressure on roads and bridges everywhere? We are running a deficit, and once we start to get more money into the treasury, then, you know, we're going to fall further behind.

I don't think this is a very prudent way to spend taxpayers' hard-earned money. You know, with all the money we are spending like drunken sailors, we are not saving for future generations. What will happen when our nonrenewable resources are gone? What are we going to do then? We have been depending too much on the nonrenewable sources of money, and we haven't been saving for future generations. Future generations own those resources and have a right to those resources as much as we have now. We should be thinking about future generations as well. If you want them to have a good quality of life and the same standard of living, if not better, as we have today, then we should be managing our money properly.

Again, with \$150 billion gone, you know, we're in a deficit situation, and the government should have their priorities straight. We talk about Environment, and there are cuts there. Our environment is probably going to go down the tubes the way we are going at it. All those abandoned wells: we have billions and billions of dollars in liability in that. I don't see anything in the budget for taking care of all those abandoned wells.

4:20

So with the cutbacks we are laying off teachers. I see here the Education expense, but it is not an expense; it is an investment. When we spend on education, we are educating Albertans, and they have to compete globally now. We are not isolated anymore. We have to have state-of-the-art schools in our education system. We have to have state-of-the-art technical schools if we are to compete globally. You know, with these cutbacks who knows? Education is the best investment. If you educate Albertans, they will have good jobs, and they will be contributing to the economy.

You know, the federal government is talking about building jails and buying jets. I think there should be more money for health care and for education. Instead of spending money on jails, we should be educating people. If people are educated, then maybe young people will stay away from crime. Here we give them an out. Instead of building jails and remand centres and all that, we should be spending money where it's going to be productive in the economy.

What their priorities are. I keep on talking about the airport tunnel, and here when I was advocating for the airport tunnel,

there was no money for the airport tunnel. I believe that had we been keeping our priorities straight and managing the money properly, we could have had money for all the programs that we run. With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have two questions, actually. A growing chorus of individuals and groups are calling for a public inquiry over a variety of health care delivery concerns, including workplace intimidation due in part to a significant lack of whistle-blower protection. However, when the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, the United Nurses of Alberta, and the health sciences group, the front lines of defence, added their concerns, they were chided by members of this government as only being concerned about their own contract-bargaining welfare. The government has suggested that a public inquiry would take too long and would be too expensive. Do you believe that the inquiry is needed and worth the investment in terms of creating an improved climate for health care delivery, including patient advocacy?

Also, Bill 1 will be debated a little later. Can you draw a direct connection between Bill 1, the Asia Advisory Council Act, and the connection with the airport tunnel and the need for funding from both the federal and provincial governments, funding that, as you've noted, has yet to arrive?

The Acting Speaker: I hope we can draw the connection to Bill 17.

Mr. Chase: Funding.

Mr. Kang: Well, in talking about the public inquiry, I think the minister has said that he doesn't want to spend \$30 million or \$40 million. If we have the public inquiry on health care, that \$30 million or \$40 million that we're going to spend on the public inquiry, who knows? When the front-line workers and everybody come out to openly talk about what's needed to fix the health care system, it will probably save us millions. You know, we will not know until we have the public inquiry and we hear from all of the related parties about this. I strongly believe that if we have the public inquiry, we can probably fix the health care system. We are spending almost 40 per cent of our budget on health care, \$14 billion or \$15 billion. I think that if we spend \$30 million and can save maybe \$200 million or \$300 million, it will be well worth the money.

Coming to Bill 1, you know, that money will be well spent, too, because we should not be depending on our friends to the south; we should be diversifying our economy. I will be talking later on about Bill 1. In India, China, and even Southeast Asia the economies are growing by 8 per cent a year. I believe that India's GDP is about \$1.4 trillion and that by the year 2025 or 2030 their economy is going to surpass Germany's and Japan's. By the year 2050 they will maybe be number two or three. So we need to diversify our economy.

We need all of our infrastructure in place, too. That's why I keep on talking about bridges. That's why I keep on talking about the Airport Trail tunnel. Even the Premier has been saying, you know, that we should let the airlines from the Middle East, U.A.E., come into Calgary. We need more international connections coming to Alberta so that we can benefit from diversifying our economy. We need that infrastructure. We should be spending money on infrastructure now, and we should get our priorities

straight. The airport tunnel will not only save money in the long run through businesses and all those people working there – you could even take the C-Train to the airport and that – but all Albertans would benefit. That would even be good for southern Alberta. It will contribute big time to our economy, too.

I strongly believe that we should have our priorities straight; we should have infrastructure for the future. Now it's going to cost us maybe \$300 million to build the airport tunnel, but if you were to do it in the future, it's going to cost billions of dollars. It will be much wiser and more prudent to do it now than to do it five or 10 – I'm sure we're going to do it five or 10 years down the road, but we should be doing it now. You know, in the budget we should consider all that much-needed, vital infrastructure for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Seeing none, do any other members wish to debate Bill 17?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Groeneveld	Prins
Amery	Hancock	Quest
Bhardwaj	Horne	Renner
Brown	Jablonski	Rogers
Campbell	Klimchuk	Sandhu
DeLong	Mitzel	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Morton	Vandermeer
Elniski	Oberle	Webber
Fritz	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Griffiths		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Notley
Boutilier	Hinman	Pastoor
Chase	Kang	
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 8

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

Bill 16 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

[Debate adjourned April 21]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you adjourned the debate. Do you wish to continue, or are you finished?

Ms Notley: I'm finished.

The Speaker: Okay. Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

4:40

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be rather brief because I am in favour of Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. It creates a regulatory framework for a new class of petroleum production called in situ coal schemes, that produce synthetic coal, gas, and liquids through in situ coal gasification and liquefaction; eliminates the current regulatory regime of indus-

trial development permits, which exist to prevent resource waste, as the regulations currently applied have been superseded over time by environmental regulation; expands the breadth of the oversight provided by the Market Surveillance Administrator under the Electric Utilities Act and the Alberta Utilities Commission under the Gas Utilities Act; and changes the definition of oil sands facilities.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, I am very aware, Mr. Speaker, that what we're talking about is an extraction from an underground source through heating up the source. The gas is produced underground and then collected. However, as we move forward into the future, it's been estimated that we have somewhere between the potential of 200 to 500 years of coal reserves. Unlike what a former Premier suggested, that this is clean coal, it may be to a degree cleaner than some other forms of coal, but its best use, as opposed to turning it into coke going up chimneys, causing a whole variety of chemical and CO₂ emissions, is the gasification process.

When we run out of our conventional oil and gas and when we run out of the less than conventional bitumen resources and we run out of the natural gas and the shale gas, then we can at least look forward to a slightly more expensive extraction process, turning that coal into a gasification process. Alberta is fortunate, depending on how we develop this resource environmentally and sustainably, to have this rich, nonrenewable resource on top of the gas, on top of the conventional oil resources that we have.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, how we extract that gas into the future needs to be carefully considered. We have had concerns about, for example, the fracking process for shale gas. While the same type of fracking isn't required to heat the underground seams to produce the synthetic coal gas, obviously we're going to have to do it with the most up-to-date scientific methodology going forward. We also have to be aware of capturing the majority of that gas, and for anything that we fail to capture, obviously we have to have some kind of a sequestering approach so that for what somehow escapes capture, if that case happens, we have an ability to sequester it so it doesn't simply become one more atmospheric pollutant.

Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011, is a step in the right direction. As long as we balance it with environmental, sustainable methodology, then it serves as an economic resource that, hopefully, we can use into the future to help to sustain our programs. It adds length to the possibility of our nonrenewable resource revenue, but in itself it isn't a replacement for clean or green energy sources. Of course, I am not including nuclear under that category.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to debate Bill 16.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for comments or questions.

Anyone else wish to speak?

Mrs. Forsyth: I'd like to speak to the bill, not ask him questions.

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and speak in support of Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. I want to get on the record that we support the intent of the bill to provide the regulations for in situ coal gasification, eliminate duplicative regulations of energy use already administered by Alberta Environment, and actually strengthen the powers of the Market Surveillance Administrator, known as the MSA. It's good to see that this bill reduces one of the thousands of cases of overregulation in the province; namely, the duplication of

regulations governing energy use for the industry and manufacturing. I know that the mover of the bill has done a lot of work on this particular bill, and we appreciate all of the work that she has done in regard to bringing Bill 16 into the Legislature.

The other part of the bill clarifies and strengthens the power of the Market Surveillance Administrator. That person's role is to be an independent policeman for our power market. We did some research on the Market Surveillance Administrator, however, and we had trouble sort of finding any activity on this particular position, the MSA. We're concerned about exactly what this Market Surveillance Administrator will be doing, his independence, after all, because of the fact that he is appointed by the minister. We've got some concerns there, but second reading is just to get an idea of what people are thinking, and we look forward to discussing in committee what the role is of this particular administrator, some discussion in regard to his independence. While the minister appoints him, it's important for us to understand independence, reporting mechanism, et cetera.

With those short notes, I look forward to more discussion in second and probably more discussion after that in committee. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. The act touches many different areas in our energy statutes and, therefore, has many separate objectives. It's going to create a framework for the Energy Resources Conservation Board to regulate in situ coal schemes in a similar fashion to conventional petroleum deposits.

The intent of the bill seems to be that it's going to streamline the regulatory process for conventional coal deposits to speed up, probably, the licensing for the companies to do business, and it will eliminate the duplication, like cutting the bureaucratic red tape. It will eliminate the duplication of the regulatory process for industrial developments that consume large quantities of energy resources, expand the oversight of gas distributors and default gas providers to ensure system safety and additional consumer protections by harmonizing regulations with electric utilities.

The bill's intent is also to expand oversight of the Alberta Independent System Operator by the Market Surveillance Administrator to ensure efficient operation of the Alberta electricity market and to reclassify downstream facilities that process oil sands products to encourage investment in downstream activities.

4:50

The amendments to the Coal Conservation Act will create a regulatory framework, and by changing the definition of coal and defining coal seams, it may turn some marginal coal deposits from mineral resources to pore space, potentially changing the ownership if mineral rights are owned by private interests, and allow the use of very low-quality coal formations as carbon capture and storage reservoirs. It will be very important to raise this in the House to seek clarification on this, Mr. Speaker. The creation of a regulatory framework for in situ coal schemes may encourage investment, research, experimentation, and development, and that may evolve into more environmentally friendly alternatives to conventional coal used over time, most likely for the generation of electricity.

This new in situ coal scheme I think will be good for the environment, too. It will bring more investment into the province. My concern is the boom-and-bust situations we've been in before. If

this is going to create a boom, you know, how are we going to manage this? Are we going to have some kind of a management regulatory body in place? We don't want to get caught in the same situation we were in before with the oil sands: too much development coming in, and we couldn't find skilled labour, and the economy was heating up.

Also, eliminating industrial development permits may allow for rational self-interest to overrule collective interest at times. For example, preventing the burning of ethanol as fuel but reserving it for use as petrochemical feedstock may be more difficult than an environmental regulation. Reclassifying downstream oil sands processing facilities may change oil sands projects payoffs for a period and create tax and royalty regime advantages, which may encourage more value-added industry to be placed in Alberta rather than in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, this act is a mixed bag, as one would expect any amendment package of such breadth. In its totality the good elements outweigh the bad ones. The loss of industrial development permits removes an avenue for the rejection of large industrial facilities that consume Alberta's energy resources. This would be most significant if permits were ever rejected. While the Alberta Liberal government might wish to implement similar provisions that are being removed by this act, it is not a significant loss to the public good under the current government.

In situ schemes generating synthetic gas and oil is a developmental technology that may in the future become economical, which may present massive opportunities given Alberta's large coal reserves, and this regulatory framework is a rare example of the government showing a degree of foresight. The creation of a new regime to regulate in situ schemes also moves Alberta closer to being able to use coal for electricity generation in a manner that produces emissions much closer to the level of natural gas fired generation than current coal plants. A power plant fired by synthetic coal gas or liquid also shows much greater promise of being integrated into a successful carbon capture and storage system than a conventional coal-powered station.

The expansion of oversight by the Alberta independent electric system operator of gas distributors, gas default supply providers, and gas utilities will help to improve the function of the utility system as designed while increasing consumer protection. While we might object to the fundamental design of the system, most notably permitted profit margins and distribution of capital costs among market participants, there is no reason to object to the real marginal improvements of the existing system. So a vote for marginal improvements is not a vote for endorsing the current system, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn the debate on Bill 16. Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 15

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes. Speaking in favour of Bill 15 . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're on Amendment A1, which was moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Does everyone know what the amendment was?

Mrs. Forsyth: I do. I have it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, then.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm rising to speak in support of Amendment A1 under the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011. I want to put on the record, first of all, that I support Bill 15, and I think that there's no question that the Victims of Crime Amendment Act is designed to increase benefits paid to victims and improve their support programs.

What I like about the amendment that the hon. member is bringing forward is the statute of limitations timeline. I had the opportunity to talk to her about that, and she brought up what I considered some very significant information in regard to why we should support that. One of the things is that if as a child you've been sexually abused and finally decide to come forward – and I think someone that would be a very good person to look at is Theo Fleury, who was sexually abused, I think, starting when he was 14, by one of his coaches. I don't know how old he is now, but I would imagine he's in his late 30s, early 40s. Theo, forgive me if I'm aging you. I just want to tell you just how much I admire your courage to come forward.

There are incidents like that. If you have a child – and they could be someone like Theo Fleury, for example – a child that has been sexually abused when they were young, and they decide to seek some financial compensation maybe when they're 25 or 30 years old, it could be 10, 15, 20 years later. I think it's important that as a government we talk about one of our priorities being the protection of children in this province. The bill clearly indicates that it's for victims of crime and compensation provided to victims of crime.

I wanted to just get on the record that we support the amendment from the member and also support the bill, but we want to see the amendment supported.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to the amendment, and I'll do so very briefly. The object of this limitation period is certainty. The member tries through the amendment to take it back to the injury rather than the commission of an offence. The commission of an offence is clear. It provides certainty in the subsequent period before the expiry. By taking it to the injury or the impact of an injury on an individual, it becomes again unclear as to when that appeal period or the filing, the notification period, actually expires. What we're attempting here is to provide certainty, which this doesn't do.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek brought up the incidence of a hockey player that was abused as a child. The amendment actually removes the 10-year extension from when that child reaches the age of majority. I don't know if that was intended or not, but I would strongly oppose that. It also removes a 10-year extension in the event that the person was unsure of the commission of an offence. I'm not real clear on why the 10-year exemption is completely gone now. But, again, the purpose of this moving from injury to the commission of an offence and such offence needing to be reported is that it provides absolute certainty as to when those timelines expire.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms. Notley: Thank you. Well, I find it interesting that the minister suggests that somehow the amendment takes out what you refer to as an extension. My reading of this is that your proposed amendment to the legislation will impose a 10-year limitation period, a flat 10-year limitation period no matter what.

Your amendment is proposing to do three things. It's proposing to redefine the two-year limitation period from awareness, and it redefines it from awareness of an injury to awareness of an offence, which limits the scope. Then the next thing that it does is it proposes to add an absolute 10-year limitation period where there was none before. Your current act does not have a 10-year limitation period. Then it proposes to also add a 10-year limitation period from the age of 18, but your current act has no limitation period for 10 years. You simply have the two years from awareness.

What you're doing is that even if the person is unaware 10 years after the offence or the injury has occurred that they are a victim and have sustained an injury from that offence, they lose the ability to pursue any kind of compensation. Your act is very much limiting the scope of eligibility. The classic situation, as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek already identified, is one where people who are victims of violence or crimes as children suffer psychological injury which they're not aware of until more than 10 years after they turn 18 or more than 10 years after the offence. Those people would no longer be eligible for compensation under your proposed amendment. My proposed amendment to change your act is to eliminate that so that you do not impose a 10-year limitation period on children who are victims of crime, who may not be aware of the psychological injury they suffer until after 10 years subsequent to the crime.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking in favour of amendment A1, I very much appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has a legal background and therefore uses that legal understanding and knowledge for the betterment of the amendment to Bill 15, Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2011.

I agree with the hon. member's explanation as to why the 10 years, basically a statute of limitation for compensation, should not be part of the act, particularly if an offence occurs when a child is extremely young. For example, the onset of mental illness: if it's going to strike, it strikes 40 per cent of individuals by age 14. If you do the math, if a person is assaulted at age two, they're expected to somehow bring forward a claim or a victimization concern at age 12. That's a very large expectation. The continuing trauma, the result of an act of crime, should not have a time limitation on it in terms of the compensation.

The other part of the bill basically prompts the courts to act in a responsive manner. Within two years from the date of the injury or within two years from the date when the victim becomes aware or knows or ought to know the nature of the injury and recognizes the effect of the injuries: for those who are not minors and have an understanding of the type of assault or whatever the victimization was, they should expect that the wheels of justice and the compensation should roll out within a timely period. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is recognizing the government's original wisdom in the creation of that amendment.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to voting on the amendment and then moving ahead to debate Bill 15, the Victims of Crime Amendment

Act, 2011, as amended because I'm supportive of the intent of both the bill and the amendment.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope that the government members are listening to this debate because this is really important. I know we go through a lot of kind of painstaking, technical things that we deal with in the Legislature. They're still important, but obviously some things are more important than others. This is an important amendment for many reasons. It is critical that you, please, do give it the time of day.

The issue I have with the amendments the government is bringing into their bill is that they put on a 10-year absolute limitation. That means that if somebody is abused as a child and they, say, were abused at age six or whatever and then it comes forward, you know, that when they're 28 or something, they realize that they've been abused in this way and they just start dealing with it, then they wouldn't be entitled to compensation under this act because it wouldn't come within the 10-year absolute limitation period.

This is a serious omission, and I personally don't think there's anyone over on that side who – well, I don't know. Maybe there needs to be some education in this regard. There are people out there that endure horrible things, and they bottle up those issues and those memories when they're children. They can be abused at ages two, three, four, five, six, seven, et cetera, even eight or even after that, and it is such a traumatic experience for them that they suppress those memories. It's actually a physical thing that happens. Physically, mentally they suppress those feelings. It's a bit of a survival mechanism, a coping mechanism, but it is a complete block off, where literally they forget or they just block it off in their mind.

I know it's hard for us who haven't gone through such abuse to understand it, but that is absolutely the case. That is what happens. There are many, many cases where an adult will all of a sudden have these memories start coming to them and will realize some of the awful things that have happened to them in the past and in explicit detail. They can go to counselling and actually work through these things and separate fact from fiction and make sure that they know and are able to bring these memories up in their mind and start coping with them and start healing from them. A lot of times this doesn't happen until age 25, 30, 35. It can go longer, but that's usually where it occurs, kind of in that early adulthood age.

5:10

It's a very serious and painful ordeal for those involved to have to go through, so I don't think that there's an understanding here. Maybe it was just an oversight, but I don't think that having a 10-year absolute limitation is right. I understand the need for certainty or the desire for certainty, but, you know, someone who was molested as a two- or three-year-old is just as much a victim as someone who is molested as a 16- or 17-year-old and who can remember the whole thing all the way through. We need to in our society make it very clear that we value these individuals as much and abhor the crimes committed against them as much as we do those who were abused later in life, which is also just as serious.

I feel that this amendment sends a message that for these folks, these victims who were abused early in their childhood and who are just coming to grips with that today or later on in their life, their victimization is somehow less serious or even, I would say, less believable. That's what a lot of these folks struggle with, that a lot of people don't understand how a child could forget such awful things happening to them. They don't understand that. So

one of the things they have to cope with is trying to get people to believe them, that these things actually did happen in their young life even though they had forgotten it for a period of time through their early teens and on towards even sometimes into their 20s.

By passing this, again, it shows kind of, I think, a lack of sensitivity to these victims, who need to be believed. They need to feel that their victimization is every bit as serious as that that's happened later on in a person's life and has been remembered all the way through. That's critical.

There's no doubt in my mind that the Solicitor General of this province is someone that has zero tolerance for any kind of sexual abuse towards children and is very sincere in his desire to protect children and victims of abuse. There's just no doubt in my mind about that, but I do think that for whatever reason this amendment to institute a 10-year absolute limitation – obviously, I don't think this was thought out properly. That's fine. You know, there are a lot of things happening, and that can happen.

I would ask the Solicitor General to seriously consider leaving that absolute limitation out, to not put that in, to make sure that for our kids or our adults that have been abused as children and who have suppressed those memories or who weren't aware of the crime, et cetera, until later on in life, their rights be respected and guarded just the same as you would somebody who knew of the abuse right away.

Again, I know that it's very tempting to put limitations or – what's the word? You want certainty in the legislation. I understand that. I mean, we do want certainty in legislation as much as possible. But some things in life you just can't be certain about. Some things are so awful and evil that they don't conform. You can't deal with them in a conventional way like you can with things like fraud and other things like that. It's just too difficult to deal with these things. Even though it might mean some extra cases and some extra monies or extra uncertainty in this regard, I just think that we need to bite the bullet and realize that for these types of cases it's very critical for us to be as flexible as possible to make sure that we give the victims all possible flexibility, all possible ability to somehow find justice and somehow get compensated for the horrors that they had to endure as children. I just think that this is very critical.

Obviously, we have disagreements in this House about many different issues. One thing that I don't feel we have any disagreement about is the importance of protecting our children and the sanctity of their innocence. When that's violated, we have to make sure that even when it's a little messy and even when things are a little uncertain, we do the right thing anyway, and we give them all the time in the world to be able to get back on track. If this victims of crime statute helps them to feel like they're being restored a little bit – this, of course, will never take away the pain, will never fully compensate them for what's been stolen from them – it's a start.

The most important thing is the message from the Solicitor General, the Justice minister, the government of whoever they are on that day. It's an affirmation to them that their victimization was every bit as egregious and awful as anyone else's sexual victimization or any other victimization and that they will be able to be compensated and be treated in the exact same way as anyone else. I hope the government will consider this over the next little while as we debate it.

I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing such a timely amendment forward.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I listened with intent and interest to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and also the hon. Member for Peace River and, of course, the author of the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think it's important, as we listen here, that this is an example of where we can reach agreement. Of course, I'm going to be watching closely for the support of the Solicitor General, the Member for Peace River, for the amendment that's being put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona because, clearly, she is on the right side with this amendment.

I heard with interest the Solicitor General talk about the issue of certainty, and I think we understand that certainty, but I think it's important that amendment A1 is providing even greater certainty of flexibility when it comes to victims and children who have endured something so horrible in the past. I would hope that the Solicitor General and Member for Peace River would be supporting the amendment that's being put forward, amendment A1, by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. No matter what political party, I think we can all have something in common when it comes to protecting our children.

It's also interesting to note that the current act does not have a 10-year limitation period in it. What's really important is limiting the scope of eligibility, which is, without question, a concern. It's an important concern of mine, and I would hope it is – and I automatically assume it is – a concern of every member in this House. That's why I would be looking for the Solicitor General and Member for Peace River to be supporting amendment A1. It is clearly on the right track in terms of providing that flexibility, and it therefore does not limit the scope of eligibility.

5:20

As was mentioned earlier, the prime example was that there should not be a time allocation, and the proposed amendment allows that to take place. The example that was used by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek of the former National Hockey League player is a prime example that if, in fact, what is being proposed goes through, the current act in its old, existing form, again, did not have a 10-year limitation period. This amendment, that has been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, wants to ensure that examples such as what was mentioned earlier, the former NHLer who, you know, should not be penalized in any way, shape, or form because of a time allocation – A1 is providing, I believe, greater certainty, which was mentioned by the Solicitor General, but greater certainty of flexibility as opposed to what is being suggested. That's why I would anticipate and expect the government's Solicitor General to support the amendment that is being put forth by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona because, clearly, she is on the right side of right, and I'm convinced that the Solicitor General and government members want to be on the right side of right as well, to ensure that we do not restrict, do not limit in terms of a 10-year limitation period.

I don't know if it was intended, but the result of amendment A1 as it stands today, I believe, is an important amendment to ensure that that restriction is lifted, the 10-year limitation period. The current act does not have one, and it should not have one in any amendments that are being put forward by the government. This amendment is, clearly, an important one to ensure that limiting the scope of eligibility is simply not a noble principle in the issue of protecting our children.

The proposed amendment A1, Mr. Chairman, is a very good amendment. I would anticipate that every single member of this House will support this amendment that is being put forward so as to ensure that there is no 10-year limitation period and that we show certainty, we show compassion, and we show the flexibility

to clearly indicate that in voting for this amendment, we'll be voting on the right side. We'll be voting for children who have experienced horrible things in the past, and it will not restrict – will not restrict – them from coming forward in years to come. The former NHLer Theoren Fleury was the example. He would not be able to come forward, in fact, given what is being proposed by the government.

I think that on this amendment, that is being proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the excellent comments by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the comments by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek clearly – I welcome further comments by the Solicitor General to ensure that the principles of what is being proposed in this amendment will be followed through in protecting our children.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, am supporting this bill.

The Deputy Chair: The amendment.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry; the amendment. I just don't think that time frames can be put on these types of incidents. I think of some of the cases, the cold cases, that are now being looked at and actually solved. There is different technology, certainly, in terms of DNA.

We talk about this as compensation. Not everything is about money. I will use the example of the two hockey players. In fact, Sheldon Kennedy was one of the first ones to come out. His abuse was at the hands of the same coach that Theoren Fleury was coached by. These men had gone through hell, absolute hell, before they could come out and talk about these sorts of things in public. Both men have to be thanked profusely because maybe they have saved some other young men from this sort of abuse.

Sometimes it isn't about money. It's about being recognized that you, in fact, were a victim and that you, in fact, were right.

I read something in the paper just, actually, last week. It was about a 92-year-old black woman in the southern States, where 70 years later it was recognized that, yes, in fact, she was a rape victim by a gang of people. They had the names, but no one ever paid attention in those days. So 70 years later this woman has received the compensation for the dignity that she deserved and that it should have been recognized 70 years previous to that.

We have to recognize that if a crime has been committed, there is always a victim. That victim has to be validated, and there are so many different ways. It isn't just the sexual abuse of children, who forget about it, because both Sheldon Kennedy and Theoren Fleury did not forget about it. But what they had to do was realize that they were incapable of long-term relationships. They turned to drugs and drinking. They, basically, almost ruined their lives until there was that point where, in fact, they had help.

So, yes, there is always a victim that has to be validated. It isn't always about money. Sometimes an apology is necessary. Sometimes to be able to face that perpetrator years and years and years later helps the person who was the victim to go forward. Many people stop in their lives.

It isn't just young people. There are many women and, actually, there are men as well that are raped, and they know full well what has happened. They can't prove it, but they know it. They go forward trying to live a normal life when, in fact, life has not been normal, nor will it ever be again.

I think it's very important not to put a time frame on what happens in life. All we have to do is look at history and see how things can come out even within families, the family secrets, so to

speak. It often comes out, sometimes in a second generation, 50 years later, 60 years later. Emotions and people and life: life is certainly not a certainty. Trying to put a time frame or a certainty on life I think is impossible, and I think it shouldn't be legislated.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this particular amendment. I want to start out by saying that I appreciate very much the hon. member bringing this amendment forward and highlighting the concern with respect to a particular area that I think all of us are very much hearing about and concerned about, and that's children who are affected by people who may or may not be people who are their parents or their caregivers or someone else who has a position of authority over them in their life, a hockey coach or whomever. The issue here is really one of: when can people apply for benefits, and what sorts of limitations are there on the application? I think the hon. Solicitor General has very clearly, through a consultation process with the public, talked about how we can improve the Victims of Crime Act, how we can create greater certainty around the victims of crime fund and its operation, and I think that's all very laudable.

5:30

We do have limitations in life in terms of how long something can go before you bring it forward, and in this particular act and this particular section 12, 12.2 in particular, it's really talking about the distance between the reporting of a crime and the ability to come forward as a victim of that crime and apply for benefits under the act. In the normal course one would assume that there should be some time limitation. You should know that you are the victim of a crime. You would know fairly quickly in most circumstances that you are the victim of a crime, and then you would be able to come forward and under the Victims of Crime Act look for the benefits that are there.

The particular circumstance that the hon. member has raised relative to children is more problematic because there may or may not be an appropriate opportunity for a child. Whoever was responsible for that child up until their age of majority may not have taken steps on their behalf, and they should not be precluded from that just because somebody else has not acted appropriately on their behalf. In fact, as has been said, there may be a circumstance where it doesn't actually come to light, come to their recognition or understanding for some considerable period of time. I don't think it's the intention of the Solicitor General, in bringing this forward, to automatically preclude all those circumstances. It's really the intention here to put some appropriate parameters around who can apply and when they can apply so there's some certainty to the fund and the operation of the fund.

As I said at the beginning, I appreciate the hon. member bringing this forward. My view would be that without a thorough analysis of this and how it impacts the rest of the operation of the act, it would be imprudent to pass this amendment at the moment. But I think it would be very prudent for us to say to the Solicitor General that he should have his staff have a look at the comments that have been brought forward and do an analysis on that particular circumstance of something which comes to light much later in a person's life about something that happened to them during childhood and see whether that fits within the Victims of Crime Act.

This is not a compensation act in the sense that it's intended to right all the wrongs. This is a victims' fund, and it's intended to assist victims through a process. So we're talking here about

something which is a little bit disassociated from that but still very relevant, and it might be something which could be properly compensable. I would have thought it might have come up during the review that was done, but certainly statutes should be living documents. I think just because we pass this act today doesn't mean this particular concern shouldn't be dealt with over the longer term, and if there is a real concern there, that could be brought forward in an amendment at a future time.

I'd also indicate that I think this type of amendment – we get to look at acts on our side of the House, obviously. We develop them. Our committees look at them. We go through a very thorough analysis of what's happening and why we're doing it. I've always encouraged people bringing forward substantive amendments to bring them to my attention as House leader or to the sponsoring minister's attention early so that that type of analysis can be done to see whether it has an impact on other aspects of the act.

For today I would recommend to the House that we not pass this amendment but that the Solicitor General, having heard this debate, might take this back, take a look at it, and determine whether or not there's something which might be done at a future date if rights are being affected in the manner that the hon. member has raised.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This little conversation has been fascinating, quite frankly. I listened very intently to the Government House Leader and how he spoke about how the government has the opportunity to have legislation before them for a longer period of time than the opposition. It's amazing to me that if the government has this legislation before them for a longer period of time, they just can't get it right.

You know, he spoke about the Solicitor General having the opportunity to do some consulting. Well, I happened to be the Solicitor General from 2001 to 2004, and I'm struggling with the difficulty of both the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice missing this. If you go to the legislation – it's page 6 – it talks about an application for benefits, and it clearly says under 12.2(1): "An application under section 12 or 12.1 may be made only if the offence was reported to a police service within a reasonable period of time after the offence occurred." If you want to talk about applications for benefits, it's talking about a reasonable period of time after the offence occurred.

If you're a six-year-old and you've been sexually abused, a horrific thought, but say that the dad – as the former minister of children's services I hate to wake Albertans up, but there are lots of dads who have sexually abused their children with the whole family intact. If you go under application where the victim was a minor, which is 12.3,

If the victim was a minor at the time the offence occurred, an application under section 12 must, . . .

There are always those words within government. It's called must versus may. Must is a very strong legal term. I've learned that in my time in government.

. . . subject to the regulations, be made within 10 years from the date the victim reaches the age of majority.

You can fully understand why the member is bringing forward an amendment asking for that statute of limitation to be removed. The bill clearly states under application for benefits, 12.2(1), and then goes into (2).

- (a) within 2 years after the date on which the victim or applicant, as the case may be, first knew, or in the circumstances ought to have known, that the offence occurred, or
- (b) within 10 years after the offence occurred.

Under subsection (a) it talks about the victim or applicant, which could mean the child or the parent of the child. There again it goes to my point where I spoke about the fact that you've had sexual abuse in a family – and, unfortunately, in this province there are many, many cases where dad could have been the sexual abuser or mom, for that matter – and mom or dad on the other side are too embarrassed to report it or too afraid to report it.

One just needs to look at all of the work that the organization Little Warriors is doing at this particular time in regard to bringing the issue of child sexual abuse to the front. It's one of those subjects that people don't want to talk about. From many instances, when I was minister of children's services, in regard to sexual abuse, some so horrific that they're still etched in my mind, and from what I've read – I thought I was pretty knowledgeable after being the Solicitor General for four years till I hit that particular ministry. I've got to tell you that that one really wakes you up when you see all of the horrific things that are happening in this province.

Let's step away from sexual abuse. If we want to step away from that, let's talk about child pornography. You have a child that is subject to child pornography, and they have been filmed in some pretty horrific incidents by a family member, whether it's an uncle or a dad or an aunt or a grandma or a grandfather. When you're looking at the mind of a two- or three-year-old, you're not understanding. I mean, I remember, when I was the minister, dealing with a 17-year-old who thought at that particular time, after we apprehended her and brought her into care, that it was perfectly normal to have sex with her dad. She knew nothing different, knew nothing was abnormal in that fact till she reported it, coincidentally, to a janitor in the school.

These are the kind of things that I think the government has to realize. They have to understand that I think what frustrates Albertans more than anything, in my time involved in child prostitution, in any of that kind of stuff – child pornography, sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol – is that we're all talking about victims. They're all victims, and the government needs to stick up for these particular individuals.

I mean, I don't think people can appreciate, as we sit here in our suits and our ties and our dress clothes, how this paralyzes victims and the suffering that they go through. I go back again to Theo Fleury, watching him. I think he was 14 when it happened. It came out 20 years later, and he was still feeling extreme pain. I don't recall anyone at that particular time advocating for him. You certainly see all sorts of people now becoming advocates. I know the minister of children's services, for that matter, becomes an advocate for the children that are under their care when they realize that these children have been sexually abused.

5:40

In my time I have met children that had been sexually abused when they were five or six, and you're talking to them at a youth forum or something when they're 22 or 23. I think it's important for us to understand that of many of the children that are involved in child prostitution or, for that matter, that we've apprehended off the street, we've found that a very high proportion have been sexually abused when they were young.

It's interesting to hear the Minister of Education and House leader talk about and mention in his speaking that: let's pass this bill, and then we'll bring an amendment later. Well, it's always later, or it's always sooner. We're on the floor of the Legislature right now. It's what I consider a significant and good amendment, and we have the opportunity at this time in committee to accept the amendment from the member. She is hearing from people, advocacy groups, and I'm sure that in the Twitter world this will

be followed now. I know we're going to start getting e-mails about it. So I'm again asking the Solicitor General to accept this amendment from one of the opposition members.

We look forward to continuing to debate this legislation. I know the Member for Calgary-Varsity as a former educator is very, very passionate about children. He has taken on a case himself in regard to the 15-year-old that we both know and are involved with, whom he has been advocating for in the Legislature. As the minister indicated, we've now got her in some secure treatment for a few days. It's like the revolving door he referred to earlier.

I think it's a time right now when we can do something on behalf of those who were abused when they were younger and provide them not only the protection that I think they deserve but the protection they need with the Victims of Crime Act. This way it'll provide them some compensation so that they can seek some counselling that they probably, without question, deserve.

Once again, we're in committee, and that allows us to speak as many times as we want, quite frankly, and we will continue to listen to what the government has to say. As I indicated earlier, I was somewhat disturbed, actually, to hear what the House leader, the Minister of Education, had to say. I know he advocates on behalf of children because as the former Justice minister we spent four years advocating at FPTs, the federal-provincial-territorial meetings, about raising the age of consent. At every FPT meeting he made darned sure that was on the agenda, so I guess what we're doing is asking the government to accept the amendment from one of our opposition colleagues and, quite frankly, do the right thing.

The Deputy Chair: Do any members wish to speak? The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we're going to reach just a very brief stalemate here in that I wasn't made aware of the content of this amendment before we hit committee stage in this, and I in good conscience can't accept an amendment without an ability to review its full impact on the bill.

I understand very clearly the sentiment, and I think I hear that the opposition parties, all who have spoken, understand the issue of certainty. I also understand that maybe certainty is a difficult thing to achieve. Nonetheless, I want an opportunity to take the sentiment that I'm hearing over there and review this. Whether that is going to make me arrive at some comfort with the amendment or propose an additional amendment, I can't say right now, but I would like a very brief time with this.

So at this point I'd like to move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4 Securities Amendment Act, 2011

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Again, I'm quite supportive of Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011. What Bill 4 does is that it makes further amendments to harmonize the passport system that originated from the 2004 memorandum of understanding between the federal and provincial governments, excepting Ontario. It brings forward amendments to support Canada's conversion to international financial reporting standards, creates a framework for regulating credit-rating organizations, and allows the Alberta

Securities Commission to impose sanctions for late filing of disclosure that are more similar to the B.C. model. There are also further amendments to ensure that Alberta's registration regime is harmonized with other provinces'.

Now, there has been a degree of controversy, Mr. Chair, with regard to the idea of a single regulator. The Alberta Liberals have joined the government in expressing concerns about Alberta's financial interests not necessarily being well advocated for under a single securities regulator potentially operating out of Toronto. It doesn't matter so much where it operates out of; it's the singular aspect that causes concern. What we are seeing is a move to involve all the provinces in terms of having a say in the well-being of their own investments and their own securities. That's what Bill 4 attempts to do.

We have a trade agreement with British Columbia. We're moving to extend that agreement to Saskatchewan, so Bill 4 keeps in account our sort of economic provincial well-being but also, rather than simply building a wall or isolating ourselves, takes into account best practices in other provinces across this nation. For those reasons, Mr. Chair, I am supportive of Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011.

I realize in saying that, Mr. Chair, that there may be other members within this caucus who have other concerns that they may wish to bring forward or even the possibility of amendments. But in general we are supportive of the direction the government is heading with Bill 4, Securities Amendment Act, 2011.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think it's important that under Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011, clearly, the passport system is an excellent system. It has served Canada and especially Alberta very well. The passport system is flexible to local needs and to the local economy like the energy sector. Of course, Toronto is a world leader in mining and metals, and they play to their strengths, but we also play to ours here in Alberta, and we're very proud of that.

5:50

In my constituency we belong, of course, to the – very seldom can you use the word “world”, but I'm very proud to say that I am the MLA for the oil sands capital of the world. We have something that the rest of the world wants. As I look around and look at the different strengths of different provinces and different cities, I'm very proud to say that the strength of Fort McMurray, Alberta, is that it's the oil sands capital of the world. Not only that, but to add balance to that is my son, who will be turning four in May, and that we care deeply about the environment.

We believe that we can work in harmony in developing our oil sands but also in sustaining and protecting our environment. I can say that unlike any other member of this Assembly because it is my home, no one else's in this Assembly but mine. It's my home, where my three-and-a-half-year-old breathes the air each and every day. So first as a father, not as an MLA, I say that I don't think anyone will question our motivation as parents, especially on the topic that we were talking about earlier regarding what the Solicitor General, I appreciate, is going to review.

Now, the passport system can also be improved and updated when warranted. No one asserts that it's perfect, but the passport system is effective at its goal and is internationally recognized by the OECD, the World Bank, and also by the Milken Institute. Clearly, we have to look at it in the manner that Canada and Al-

berta navigated very well the recent recession, better than most jurisdictions in the world. I applaud, certainly, the federal government because of its regulatory system, not in spite of it. The economies with the greatest recession and financial catastrophe were those with national regulators like Europe and America. So I think we need to reflect on that important point.

I think, also, that securities regulation has always been a provincial jurisdiction and that it should remain a provincial jurisdiction. So there is much common ground between our provincial systems, that have been harmonized to be efficient, but at the same time there is already a very extensive collaboration to ensure a strong regulatory system. There are not 10 completely unique regulatory bodies out there; they work in harmony as a single access point for our nation, and I think this is important. Therefore, ceding regulatory authority could be a precedent that Albertans, I believe, would not like to see at this point.

As much as financial matters are important at the national level – and I applaud the Prime Minister and his government for the good work that they have done in, certainly, the OECD countries – I would like to say that when it comes to the issue of provincial regulatory authority, Alberta has done very well in managing and harmonizing with other provinces in a system that is not broken. We always take the approach of “and then some.” And then some is really the attitude of Albertans. Not only can we do something; we can do it and then some. And then some really reflects the values of Albertans – Alberta seniors, Alberta financiers, Alberta farmers, Alberta oil and gas workers, Alberta teachers, Alberta nurses, Alberta doctors – that they will do the very best in what they do and then some. I think that's a value that all members of this Assembly can agree to: and then some.

Consequently, I would like to say about the local management of Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011, that if securities regulations were centrally managed, it would likely be in Toronto. Its heart would be on Bay Street even if the suboffices were dispersed and scattered across the country.

I think it's really quite important that we can be very proud in Alberta in many areas, every province, of our leaders and the different attributes and what they do at their provincial governments, but Alberta is very, very good at asserting its responsibility with the provincial jurisdiction that it has pertaining to the Securities Amendment Act.

I would like to say, Mr. Chairman, that I don't believe a national regulator would necessarily decrease the cost of raising capital through public offerings and other mechanisms as asserted. I would also like to say that for a graduate school in another state or province, the financial means of a Bay Street or a Wall Street down in the United States plays an important role.

It's also equally interesting to note that across this world today our world continues to grow smaller. In growing smaller, it means ensuring that we never lose what I refer to as provincial capital. Provincial capital is based on provincial decision-making that is the sum of our many municipalities and our financial leaders, and I'm very proud that we have that in the province of Alberta and also proud that they share that with the rest of Canada.

Clearly, Mr. Chair, I will say that I do believe that the Securities Amendment Act is something that we in the Wildrose are watching very closely and, as we go forward, will be watching with interest.

In this act, as well, there are important points that I think need to be referenced pertaining to the issues of the act. I just want to take a moment to talk about the fact that, of course, our provincial regulation, that we have utilized with great scrutiny and certainly with due diligence, is I think a model for others to follow.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would say that at this point these are some of the comments that I make, proudly representing the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand up and talk about Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011, and offer some comments, if I may, on the bill. I think the bill's intent is meant to clarify and tighten up the passport system in Alberta and that it's looking at clearing the legal loopholes.

While mending our security legislation in this way is not controversial and is something that we can support as the Wildrose, obviously the issue of security regulations is highly controversial because of what we can see happening right now with the federal

government creating a national security regulator, one kind of a system that I've been struggling with. I know the government is struggling with this for the fact that they've pushed this as far as they can. I believe, if I'm not mistaken, that they've taken it to the Alberta Court of Appeal. I'm not a lawyer, so maybe one of the legal beagles over on the other side can clarify that.

I think my colleague has spoken in the past about security regulations, that they have always been provincial jurisdiction, and I hope they'll continue to do so.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) it now being 6 o'clock, the House is recessed until 7:30 p.m., at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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