



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Issue 33a

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.

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of students from Provost public school in the town of Provost in the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Michelle Munro, their teacher, and by parent helpers Mrs. Karen Paulgaard, Mrs. Corinne Bachmann, Mrs. Diana Kroetsch, and Mr. Martin Biro. We had a great discussion, and they asked me exceptional questions when we were down getting our pictures. They are seated today in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a second introduction if I may. I am very honoured today to have three constituents here in the gallery. They are Myron and Brenda Badry, and they were brought here today by their daughter Nicole. They have been exceptional agri-entrepreneurs in the constituency and a model for what the future of agriculture can be. They're fantastic community builders, who have done more for their community than a lot of people do. They have been close friends and helped me with my first nomination, and they were exceptional in helping to do that. I'd ask them, please, today to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure also to introduce three grade 6 classes from Timberlea school in Fort McMurray, who travelled the bumpy highway 63 to get here safely, and in doing so, I'd like to introduce them today. The teachers are Andrea Organ, Linda Nguyen, and Amanda Murray, and joining them today are teacher helpers Theresa Wells, Sheri Reid, Celina Whiteknife, Glen Noseworthy, Tammy Murphy-Becker, Sue Allen Dupreez, and Shauna Kendall. I'd like to ask the students and parents and teachers to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you several terrific Albertans who are here today visiting from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Alberta. Of course, MS affects 11,000 Albertans, including my own aunt, Mora Louise Hauk, who died last year. I would also like to thank them for providing a red carnation to raise awareness of MS in this Assembly. I'd like to introduce Judy Gordon, the former MLA for Lacombe-Stettler; James Orr; Neil Pierce; Julie Kelndorfer; Garry Wheeler; and Darrel Gregory.

They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you my executive assistant, Honor Humphreys, and our new summer student, Miss Courtney Edwards. Honor is a graduate of Haskayne School of Business and came to us from the fund development branch of the Calgary philharmonic and sat as a member of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts board. Our summer student, Courtney, is a fourth-year student at the University of Alberta working toward her BA in psychology. She is an Edmontonian born and raised and is such a loyal Oilers fan. In her spare time she likes to do yoga, run, read, and tweet. I'd like to ask Honor and Courtney to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests who have joined us this afternoon from Medicine Hat representing the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce. I understand they're attending meetings in St. Albert today and have come down to observe us this afternoon. I don't see them yet in the members' gallery. They may still be on their way in, but I'll introduce them anyway: the chairman, Milvia Bauman, the executive director, Lisa Kowalchuk; and Deanna Haysom, who is a director with the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce. If they are here, I ask them to rise and for all members to give them the usual warm welcome.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to introduce to you and through you the University of Alberta's clinical islet transplant program team. As the director of the clinical eyelet transplant program since 1998, Dr. James Shapiro, together with a dedicated team of internationally attracted clinical and laboratory staff, developed and tested a new protocol that dramatically increased insulin independence results in diabetics. This leading-edge research became known as the Edmonton protocol. The team has performed over 300 islet transplants in Edmonton, and 74 per cent of posttransplant patients are now insulin free after five years.

Mr. Speaker, with us today in the gallery are the members of Dr. Shapiro's team: Dr. Shapiro, accompanied by his wife, Dr. Vanessa Davis, and their two-month old son, Noah; Dr. Sonal Asthana, here from Delhi, India, now an Edmontonian; Dr. Boris Luis Gala-Lopez, here from Havana, now an Edmontonian; Dr. Toshiyasu Kawahara from Tokyo, Japan, accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Tomomi Kawahara, now Edmontonians; Dr. Samy Kashoush from Egypt, accompanied by his wife, Carmen Eissa, also Edmontonians; Dr. Alexandre Sarubbi Raposo do Amaral from Brazil, accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Isabella Elias Broggiato Raposo do Amaral; and their secret weapon, Cherry Robinson, who was my executive assistant for a number of years and now is Dr. Shapiro's executive assistant. I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to introduce to you and through you today to the members of this Assembly four individuals who last Friday were among the recipients of our annual crime prevention awards. Each year these awards launch Crime Prevention Week and give us the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of people and organizations in communities across our province who have gone the extra mile to help fight crime. I would ask each of the recipients to stand as I call their name and remain standing. First, we have Constable Todd DePagie of Rocky Mountain House, who was honoured for his work creating the cadet corps in the Sunchild-O'Chiese First Nation, which gives youth there constructive options for their lives. We have Wendy Huggans and Kathleen Rousselle from Driftpile First Nation, who were honoured for their work with the Driftpile choices youth program, which helps youth in grades 3 to 8 with life choices and decision-making skills. We have Constable Tara St. Denis from Peace River, who was honoured for her work with the Woodland Cree First Nation and the RCMP on such programs as the Woodland Cree youth group.

There were six other award recipients who couldn't be with us today: Trevor Tychkowsky of Smoky Lake; Lyn Michaud of Turner Valley; the Calgary Educational Partnership; Nancy Hixt, a crime reporter with Global TV; the Medicine Hat Safe Community Association; and the encouraging positive informed choices program, also from Medicine Hat.

Mr. Speaker, they have all inspired us with their hard work and determination to make Alberta a safer place to live and raise a family. I ask this Assembly to please join me in congratulating and thanking them for their work in being outstanding community crime fighters.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure and privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to the House a very special guest and personal friend who joins us in the public gallery. Arif Khan is an active member of the Alberta philanthropic community through his work as president of the Autism Society of Edmonton Area, board of trustee for Project Shelter Wakadogo in Uganda, board member of Aurora charter school in Edmonton, and board member of Sturgeon hospital foundation, St. Albert. Arif is also the incoming president of the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mayfield. I'm also proud to add that Arif will be the Alberta Liberal candidate for Edmonton-Riverview in the next election. I'd ask Mr. Khan to stand and accept our heartfelt welcome to the Legislature.

1:40

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members a number of great senior guests from Lacombe and central Alberta. They are travelling with Parsons Holiday Tours, and they are seated in the members' gallery: Mr. John Parsons, Gail Sissons, Eric Sissons, Ruth Craig, Kathleen Corkery, close neighbour and friend Evelyn Frizzell, Ben and Annie Gebbink, Frank Keough, Eleanor Denoncourt, Shirley Kole, lifelong friend Alida Harink, Dorothy Charlton, and Kathleen Smith.

Now, Mr. Parsons has been a great ambassador for the city of Lacombe and has been here many times over the years. He still runs his own holiday tour company. He is one of the younger and more spry seniors of the group, and I would call him a senior teenager at the age of 80. He's the bus driver who drives these

people around. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of all the members.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two members of our Alberta parks public safety team, Burke Duncan and Mike Koppang, and our area manager for Kananaskis Country, Dave Hanna. Burke and Mike are internationally certified mountain guides working around the clock responding to emergencies, everything from missing people to climbing and water rescues and avalanche incidents. Together our public safety specialists here today have a combined 47 years of service to our province. Their work is invaluable, and it is an honour to have Burke, Mike, and Dave with us. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six very special guests in the members' gallery from Queen Elizabeth high school, which is in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. Queen Elizabeth high school and all their alumni will be commemorating their 50th anniversary milestone this year.

My guests this afternoon include Mr. Don Blackwell, the principal of Queen Elizabeth high school for the past three years; Brenda Scaddan, the social studies department head, serving in that capacity for 10 years; Mr. Terry Godwaltdt, a teacher and coordinator of curriculum, advanced placement, and videoconferencing; Shawna Walsh, school council chairperson, who has volunteered with the school council movement for the past 18 years; Patrick Goodfellow, an enthusiastic grade 12 student who is an inspiring leader and is known for his community service and dedication to people; and finally, Diana Hadzizulfic, a grade 12 student, originally from Illinois, U.S.A., who has a passion for learning and leadership. I would now ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mrs. Mary Ann Dobson. Mary Ann Dobson is a schoolteacher at J. Percy Page high school, located in the Edmonton-Ellerslie constituency. Of course, I taught with her for two years prior to my election. I recently attended an Edmonton public school event where she was named a semifinalist for the 2011 excellence in teaching awards program.

Mrs. Dobson teaches art and believes that art is for everyone, not just for the gifted. She has received funding to start Drawn Together, a travelling sketchbook project. These sketchbooks are travelling across Alberta, providing a networking opportunity for students and teachers. The theme for the book is Identity, where the hope is that the book will increase students' understanding of one another and reduce bullying through this understanding. I wish Mary Ann continued success. At this time I'd ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of

the Legislature three staff members who have recently started working with the Alberta NDP opposition. First of all is Élisabeth Ricard, who is our new exchange student from Quebec. She hails from Montreal and is currently completing her MA in international studies. Next is Richard Liebrecht, our communications officer. He is from the great orange land of Manitoba, and he holds a degree and diploma in communications. Thirdly, Pascal Ryffel, our new outreach co-ordinator, who just started this week, recently returned from the United Kingdom, where he completed his MA in media and international development. I would like to welcome the staff members, who are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

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

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order will be dealt with. Go ahead.

Homelessness Initiative

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to update you and all members of the Assembly on Alberta's plan to end homelessness. In 2008 the Premier created the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. This secretariat recommended Housing First, a paradigm shift towards permanent housing, including extensive support to free vulnerable Albertans from the causes that lead to homelessness.

Last week the secretariat announced in the Ending Homelessness in Medicine Hat report a 10 per cent average decrease in month-to-month emergency shelter use from 2008 to 2010. Let's look around the whole province, Mr. Speaker. There has been a 16 per cent decrease in demand for emergency shelter spaces in Calgary from February 2009 to February 2011. The city of Fort McMurray has reported a 42 per cent decrease in the amount of homeless Albertans during the same period, and in Edmonton there has been a 21 per cent decrease in the number of homeless people during the same time frame. As of today 3,995 formerly homeless individuals have been housed with supports in just over two years.

Mr. Speaker, this accomplishment is a reflection of the great work from department officials and the tireless efforts from our partners with the community and private sector. Private sector and community partnerships are the foundation of Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness, and as taxpayers this program is in our interests. The cost to support a chronically homeless person with emergency support services is over three times the amount it costs to house the same person with the Housing First program. As the number of homeless people decreases, so does the cost to communities and governments to care for these individuals. We will continue to work with community-based and private-sector organizations to ensure that provincially supported initiatives align to local priorities and reflect local plans. This is especially critical to helping people regain or strengthen their independence.

Another initiative that we can all be proud of is making government identification voluntarily available to homeless Albertans. I'd have to again thank the Minister of Service Alberta for her leadership in this program. The identification can help get these people back on track as they work, rent an apartment, open a bank account, or apply for a job.

Mr. Speaker, we still have a ways to go, but we are definitely heading in the right direction, and we can be proud of the progress being made. Again, much of this is due to the incredible work being done by private-sector and community-based organizations and local groups across Alberta.

Some say that we're spending too much on this program even though I've been able to reduce our budget by 36 per cent and achieve the same results. Others say that we should be spending more even though we are meeting our goals with this leaner budget. To both, Mr. Speaker, I say that the measure of our success is in the results that we achieve, how many Albertans become independent, some of whom I had the privilege to meet personally.

I commend every member of this Assembly who has supported these efforts, both from the government and the opposition side, and the countless Albertans who remain committed to ending homelessness as we know it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals support the Housing First approach to dealing with homelessness and are extremely heartened by the enthusiasm with which this province's seven community-based homeless management bodies in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo are addressing the issue of homelessness. They have really been at the forefront of the fight to eliminate homelessness in Alberta and are deserving of much of the credit for the significant decline in the province's homeless population. I also want to acknowledge the tireless efforts of this province's many faith communities and social agencies. It is because of their dedication and compassion that the laudable goal of eliminating homelessness in Alberta will succeed.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, the desire to end homelessness in Alberta is one that is shared by all parties in this House. It's one of the few issues where you get the sense that we're all in this together and where our common humanity matters most. It is in that spirit that I'd also like to recognize the good work being done by the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and his department. Even though the Alberta government unveiled its 10-year plan to end homelessness a year or more after some of the community-based homeless management bodies, and some of those bodies are actually slated to achieve their goals well ahead of the province, the point is that the province did, to its credit, develop an overarching plan to end homelessness.

While I don't want to rubbish the progress that has been made in the ongoing fight to end homelessness in Alberta, I do want to briefly mention a few areas where, in my view, there is still room for improvement. This is based on discussions I've had with those that are on the front lines. Firstly, I think we need to do more to make the Housing First approach more inclusive and accessible to those with significant physical disabilities. I think there's a tendency to think of homelessness or the hard to house in a particular way. The reality is that the face of homelessness can be anyone, and we need to be mindful and sensitive to that. Also, I think we need to recognize that some people will require housing supports for far longer than the period of the wraparound supports that are currently being offered. In some cases support might be needed for a person's entire life. Mr. Speaker, we need to be flexible on how we approach the needs of the homeless and acknowledge that there are no two cases that are the same.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, to permit additional members to participate on this ministerial statement discussion will require unanimous consent of the Assembly, so I shall ask the question. Would all those in favour of allowing two additional speakers to participate, please say aye?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for that update. To this government's credit the 10-year plan to end homelessness actually uses the right approach to service delivery. By utilizing a competitive bidding process, we've seen significant savings to the taxpayer while maintaining high levels of quality and service. What a novel concept. Of course, the question then is: why does this government refuse to do the same in other areas? In health care we could have saved billions by introducing competitive delivery into the system, but the Wildrose plan to make those reforms was met with ridicule and fearmongering from a PC party stuck in the 1980s. On transmission lines this government awarded an untendered contract for \$16 billion worth of unnecessary upgrades to our transmission system that Albertans will be stuck paying for. Why does this approach work for homelessness but not for health care and not for transmission lines?

Saving money on construction is actually only one part of the equation. In terms of real taxpayer dollars what they save in bricks and mortar is probably covered off by what is wasted in needless bureaucracy. The fact is that seven Alberta municipalities already had their own homelessness plans. They were developed locally with real consultation with people on the ground living in their communities. In typical PC fashion this government decided that it wasn't good enough. They made their own 10-year plan because they know best, and they made other municipalities follow it. How much could we have saved if we simply financially enabled municipalities to tackle the problem themselves, as they were and remain prepared to do so? A Wildrose government would do just that.

We in the Wildrose have also questioned, several times actually, the need for this minister's particular department. He likes to talk about saving taxpayers money, and that's good, even taking credit for spending cuts in his department that were planned long before he took over. But I wonder how much money his ministry spends on bureaucratic administration simply by continuing as a stand-alone government ministry. The purview of his department clearly falls under Municipal Affairs. I suggest that if he truly respects taxpayers, he would reunite his ministry with Municipal Affairs and free up millions in savings. Mr. Speaker, that's money that could be reinvested in the very initiative that he spoke about, or it could be used to pay down the deficit, but I don't suppose anybody on that side of the House is interested in doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has hitched its wagon to a 10-year plan to end homelessness that's on a trail which assures that many Albertans will continue to struggle to have decent, affordable housing.

The government likes to talk about how many units of affordable housing have been created and about drops in the use of emergency shelters or in counts of homeless people, but there is no evidence that those changes are due to its actions or simply the result of a temporary drop in the vacancy rate. The government continues to ignore the need for a comprehensive plan for housing. Yet as long as the focus remains on the tip of the iceberg – that is,

those people who are currently and in many cases chronically homeless – and does not develop a fully integrated plan to ensure that we have enough housing for the diverse needs of all Albertans, we will continue to see new people become homeless from various perilous situations that they're in.

The 10-year plan to end homelessness owes more to the changing economic circumstances in Alberta the last couple of years than to the government's funding commitment. Since the plan began, there has never been a commitment of the amount of money the government's own committee said was needed to properly address the issue. Indeed, the minister just bragged about a 30 per cent cut to this program. Shame, Mr. Speaker.

There continues to be too much reliance on the for-profit sector in addressing affordable housing needs and too little investment in this issue. The waiting lists for low-income affordable rental housing are years long in the major cities of this province. Meanwhile some of our most vulnerable citizens, including children, people with mental illnesses, and seniors, are left in housing that is either far too expensive or far too poor in quality, and they all pay the price in their health and in their safety.

This government eliminated funding of important social housing years ago, and a huge homelessness and housing problem soon developed in our province. With the return of a stronger economy under way and more people coming to Alberta's labour market, we will see more difficulties. This government has nothing to brag about. The human costs of letting far too many people remain homeless or in poor housing in our wealthy province is a sad illustration of a government that just doesn't care about Alberta families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've all heard stories from physicians and allied health workers about intimidation and punishment for advocating for changes in the health care system. Now we hear a story from a courageous registered nurse, Terri Reuser, who tried to speak up about procedures not being followed, abusive staff, compromised patient care. Instead of being listened to, she was silenced by her managers. To the Deputy Premier: why does the government ignore the growing evidence of a culture of fear and intimidation in our health care system?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, in any workplace it is unacceptable at any time to bully people. The responsibility to treat employees respectfully is across all industries. It is unfortunate that there are going to be times when nurses disagree with doctors, when doctors disagree with doctors. They have to work those out, and when they can't, the administration has to get involved. It is unfortunate that it happens. It certainly is our intention to allow any of those circumstances to come forward in the Health Quality Council review, and I certainly hope that this nurse does.

Dr. Swann: Clearly, the Deputy Premier hasn't been listening because 30,000 Alberta health care workers do not feel confident in the Health Quality Council to hear issues of intimidation and bullying. When are you going to get it and call a public inquiry?

Mr. Snelgrove: There's absolutely no question that someone hasn't been listening, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's amazing that the Liberal caucus can take a letter from a very respected nurse and just input: oh, Tory culture of fear and intimidation. Nowhere in her letter does she mention Tory intimidation and fear. She talks about her professional association not listening. She talks about her colleagues and her employer, who is Alberta Health Services. That's why we brought forward the Health Quality Council. They will listen to people who are trying to make the system better, and then we'll make it better together.

Dr. Swann: Such disrespect from a man who says that he's representing Albertans when 30,000 of our top health workers are saying that this is a bogus investigation that cannot get to the bottom, cannot restore public confidence, and will not get professionals back onside.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I just recently got to visit my father in the hospital in Vermilion. He suffered a stroke. I can tell you that that health care system he's talking about isn't there. The nurses in that hospital, the doctors, all the people involved are treating patients with absolute care and respect. He has nothing but respect for the physicians and nurses. You know what he has for them? He wonders: are they starting to believe their own news releases?

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

2:00 Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Astronomical fee increases, teacher layoffs, special-needs program cuts: why this government's misguided cuts to education? Instead of cutting the Education budget and shortchanging children on their schooling needs, the government should be doing one of three things: cutting other government spending, dipping into the sustainability fund, or, God forbid, even reintroducing a small liquor tax. That's what governments do. They make tough decisions in order to protect children's futures. My question is for the minister of finance. Why does this government refuse to make hard decisions to protect our children's futures?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, he is partly right. They are difficult decisions we make in government when we have the needs of seniors and children in care. We have a health care system that we're managing to maintain. It's one of the best in the world. We have an education system that is amongst the best in the world that's raising students into a very competitive world. He's right. There are difficult choices to make. On the other end is the taxpayer, and we balance those judgments.

Mr. Hehr: Given that the sustainability fund was created for a purpose, why is there continual refusal not to put our children first and allocate an extra \$110 million, the amount cut from expected grants to school boards, from the sustainability fund to cut these shortfalls?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, that's why we're in this House. We have to balance the elected members who would spend everything in the kitchen until the cupboard was bare and borrow more, a party that would spend little or less on education and then pay for it down the road, or a party that is thoughtfully dealing with the financial realities we're in and appropriately allocating the money to those departments.

Mr. Hehr: Given that the reality is that children are currently being shortchanged on their education, will this government do a couple of things and either, God forbid, pass a tax, go into the sustainability fund, or cut some of the bloated government de-

partments you have to get our children the extra education dollars they need?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more to education than the money that they would like to add to it. Every now and then you have to reassess what we're doing in education, and the minister has very, very capably addressed that. We're looking at education in the next decade and for the next generation. Some of them seem to be hung up on what education might have been in the '50s or '60s. We're moving forward with a well-funded, very balanced approach to educating not only our young students but our advanced education needs as well.

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

Water Marketing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I predicted, the government's weak-kneed approach to protecting Alberta's water has resulted in multinational corporations licking their lips over the chance to buy and sell Alberta's water. The chairperson of Nestlé says that they are actively dealing with the government regarding a water exchange because, and I quote, competition could be particularly fierce between farmers for water for crops and oil companies needing water for the oil sands. To the Minister of Environment: when was the minister going to share with Albertans that he is in discussion with Nestlé about how they can be involved in selling our water in the same way other commodities are traded?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated to this member on numerous occasions, Alberta's water is not for sale and will not be for sale. The fact that Nestlé talked about being in discussions with Alberta: I have no reason to believe it's wrong. There are all kinds of corporations and lobby groups that are constantly in discussion with the government on both sides of the issue. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that in addition to Nestlé, we've heard from literally hundreds and thousands of Albertans who do not share that opinion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Interesting point. Why is it that Nestlé does not appear on the Alberta lobbyist registry? Is it because the minister approached them, and therefore the act doesn't apply, and they don't have to disclose?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this minister did not approach them. I can categorically state that that is the case. As to whether or not Nestlé has directly contacted the government, I don't know. I cannot comment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: why would this government throw our farmers into a pitched battle against multinational food giants to gain control of water, whether through water market or through sale? How on earth does that help Albertans' access to a clean glass of water?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this government would never pit farmers against the industry. I'll remind this member that the policy and the laws of Alberta are made here in this Legislature, not by some European over in Geneva. That's the way we deal with things in this province.

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

Taxation Policy

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has insisted that there will be no tax hikes on his watch, but the spending increases of this government have left us in terrible fiscal shape. Last week the outgoing Premier touted his economic council's report, which refers at least five times to the need to raise taxes in order to cover spending. Given that this administration has blown \$45 billion in royalties in five budgets and is still running a deficit, it's true that taxes or spending must change. To the finance minister: when will you admit that you plan to raise taxes to cover your reckless spending?

Mr. Snelgrove: If this were a library, that would be the fiction department, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested in Alberta \$50 billion in infrastructure. We have built and are running one of the best health care systems, one of the best education systems. We provide for our seniors like no other province. If the hon. member says that's wasting money, then he needs to stand up and tell them that.

Mr. Hinman: Well, it's not the library. This is our budget we're talking about.

Given that program spending – not capital, just programs – increased 32 per cent in your first four years, or nearly \$10 billion annually, and given that you will have nearly vaporized the sustainability fund by the end of the year, when will you tell Albertans that tax increases will be necessary to cover your opulent, nation-leading spending?

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess he's been very busy, probably too busy to review the budgets.

Over the last few years that I've been with the Treasury, Mr. Speaker, our spending was below inflation. It has been reprioritized to priority areas like health, like seniors, like education and doing what most of the world says is the right thing to do, continuing to build infrastructure right now because we're going to need it in the future.

Mr. Hinman: Well, given that your government has increased its unfunded pension liabilities from \$5.5 billion to \$10 billion and given that your program spending increases have put us in a structural deficit unless bailed out by record oil prices every year, why do you deny that this government has mismanaged our finances so badly that we are now racing down the deficit highway, not unlike the fiscal mess that you were in 20 years ago?

Mr. Snelgrove: Because, Mr. Speaker, it's simply not true. The financial statements of the province are considered the gold standard in Canada. The Auditor General goes through the statements, and they are held up to the level of any other province. Our debt and our assets are all stated in the consolidated financial statements and in the budget. If they can't read a budget, that's not my fault.

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

Water Marketing (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If this was indeed a library, that would be the comic book section over there.

Yesterday in this House the Minister of Environment proclaimed that Albertans cannot and never will be able to sell water, yet today we have learned that the PC government has been in

behind-the-scenes talks with Nestlé, one of the largest and most unscrupulous corporations in the world, to create a water market in our province. Will the Minister of Environment admit to Albertans that his government is conspiring behind closed doors with a foreign multinational to sell out Alberta's water and agree to fully disclose the content of all meetings between Nestlé and this government so that Albertans can see what . . .

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I've already stated that we meet on a regular basis with all kinds of interest groups. It should come as no surprise to any member of this House that those interested in water have been watching what has been going on in Alberta. We had three publications that have been part of the public record for quite some time now that have talked about possibilities and options for proceeding with water allocation into the future. So he can just put away all of his conspiracy theories, put them to bed, because they don't exist.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Alberta water authority proposed by the Premier's economic council is exactly what Nestlé announced that it has been working on with this government to develop and given that this demonstrates the government is taking its water policy directly from foreign corporations, again, won't the Minister of Environment admit that he and his government have been talking with Nestlé and other multinationals to create a water market that foreign corporations would control at Albertans' expense?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have been engaging in discussions about water allocation. That is not a secret. We've had numerous occasions to have that discussion in this House. I'll remind this member, just as I reminded the previous member, that the laws of this land, the policies with respect to water will be decided in this House and have nothing to do with Europeans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the chairman of Nestlé has admitted that a water market will pit the water demands of big oil corporations against the needs of small farmers and given that in any market where access to water is determined by who has the deepest pockets, our farmers will inevitably lose. Will the minister do the right thing and protect ordinary Albertans' access to water against the demands of huge multinational corporations by stopping all Tory plans to create a water market in this province?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are protected and will continue to be protected by the best water legislation anywhere in the world. I'm here to tell this member that it will always stay that way as long as Albertans demand that it stay that way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The Edmonton public school board chair has called it the worst budget for public education and school districts in years. The Catholic board chair has said that there's nothing left to trim. They have no options but layoffs to deal with budget shortfalls. To the Minister of Education. The experts are all predicting fewer teachers and larger class sizes in September. Does the government think the experts are wrong, or

does the government think that Alberta's children should have fewer teachers and larger class sizes?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what the government knows is that the education system in Alberta is one of the best in the world and will continue to be one of the best in the world. The government knows that the public school board in Edmonton and the separate school board in Edmonton are boards which people come from all over the world to look at to see what they're doing and how they're doing it well. What we also know is that we're meeting the class size guidelines across the province and beating them in every area except K to 3, so we reprofiled money to deal with class sizes in K to 3. Yes, there may be a loss of teachers over the next year due to fiscal restraint but class sizes will still . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: since the minister has stated that the boards have to decide what doesn't need to be done, can the minister please give these cash-strapped boards a hint about what the minister thinks doesn't need to be done in our public education system?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, every organization that spends the kind of money that we spend on education needs to look at what it's doing on an ongoing basis to analyze whether we're getting value for money. That means looking at every aspect of what you're doing. We can focus on class size. People believe class size to be important. Now we need to look at that issue and say: "Where is it most important? How is it most important? How do those values with respect to class size match with the values for providing early kindergarten or junior kindergarten?" Those are choices that we make in the system. School boards are elected, as we were elected, to make those tough choices. But what I can say to the hon. member is that we have the best education system in the world, and we will continue to have it.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that effective September 1 money has been discontinued for class size funding in grades 4 through 6, ESL funding, distance education funding, and funding to cope with changing enrolment, how much money has been cut from each of these programs, and where is it going?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the givens are disingenuous. English as a second language funding has not been eliminated. We fund \$1,155 per student for English as a second language. What has been eliminated is the enhanced English as a second language grant. The enhanced grant was a grant that was put in place several years ago for specific, targeted purposes, to deal with the extra issues related to immigrant students who are coming from difficult areas, war-torn areas, et cetera, to find ways to better include those children into our system. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? It's not working. We have to find a different . . .

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

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 2 Canada was blessed with a stable majority Conservative government after almost eight years of successive minority governments. Prime Minister Harper has said that western Canada can breathe a lot

easier. My questions are for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. With this level of stability what is the Alberta government looking for from this federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed very hopeful now that the Prime Minister has a majority because a majority government has a track record of following through with commitments and promises. The belief of the western opportunity is that we are the centre of the natural resources for Canada. We know that the people in Ottawa recognize the importance of a robust economy properly and responsibly developed. We're looking forward to working with Ottawa to make that happen. The Gateway pipeline to the west coast and building a stronger relationship . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. With a strong majority government can we expect possible movement on other key Alberta priorities such as fair representation and Senate reform?

Ms Evans: We are highly hopeful, Mr. Speaker, for Senate reform and a proper allocation of seats to the province of Alberta. It's something which we look forward to along with Bill C-12. We understand that that's back on the table. We think that's very good news. We're hopeful that Ottawa will regard carefully the position we have on the single regulator for securities and will look at that in the context of the comments we've made following the Supreme Court decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: given that the Canada health transfer has been a major source of contention between our governments, will a majority Conservative government finally give Alberta its fair share of health funding?

Ms Evans: I know that the President of the Treasury Board and the Member for Foothills-Rocky View have advocated strongly. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that you want to listen me. Thank you. There are others, obviously, that don't.

We hope that the health care funding will be addressed in the manner in which we have been anticipating. The Prime Minister has acknowledged a 6 per cent escalator in the Canada health transfers, and we hope that that will start to make a difference where we haven't had it in past.

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

Education Funding (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The late beloved Lois Hole said that the best of our achievements in the 20th century could be attributed to the public education system, but she had a warning that's relevant now. The education system must be adequately resourced and have the supports in place to help students reach their full potential. To the minister of finance. The minister of finance said in this Assembly on March 2 that in the next 10 years Alberta will have a hundred thousand more students. So on the basis of population growth alone how can this minister justify cuts to the Education budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, another disingenuous question. We're funding enrolment growth in our budget every year. This year the budget provides for 1.1 per cent growth in enrolment. That's over and above all of the other grant processes. We can talk about the grants that were eliminated after we analyzed whether they were achieving the purpose or not, but to suggest that we're not funding each and every child in this province effectively and efficiently with the resources of this province for their good education is just absolutely wrong.

Ms Pastoor: Actually, my third question was for the Minister of Education, so I'll try the minister of finance again. 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 this minister justify cuts to the Education budget?

Mr. Snelgrove: We had the answer on operation. Now let's look at capital cost. To put it quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's a great problem to have a province that's growing with young people. We had a presentation today from Beaumont where they have just about three times as many people under six years old in their community as they have seniors, and that's fairly rare. So this is a problem across all of Alberta, where we're going to have to bring forward an accelerated capital building plan to address those very good opportunities. To some it might be a problem. To us it's the future of our province, and we're going to fund it.

Ms Pastoor: Well, let me assure you that to us it does remain a problem, and portables are not the answer. To the Minister of Education: since the Lethbridge school district has 8,200 students in 18 schools and the board is facing a \$5 million shortfall, is this government conceding that Lois Hole's vision of public education will be lost in the 21st century? How can this minister justify cuts to the Education budget?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government embrace Lois Hole's vision for education in the future. We spent the last three years on a project called Inspiring Education. We're looking and talking about what it means to be an educated Albertan not just today with one of the best systems in the world but 30 years into the future. We're putting in place the plan for that, and we have in place the funding for that. We're talking about a 10-year plan with respect to building school capital, and we'll be moving on that. We're talking about how we ensure that every child is included in the system, and we're moving on that. Yes, we'll make sure that the appropriate funding levels are in place . . .

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

Domestic Violence

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Child sexual abuse is an issue that causes great harm and suffering. Victims are forever left with a void in their innocence. My questions are to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, government must use its voice to help those without a voice and to help prevent child sexual abuse. Will the minister of children's services commit to establishing a time-specific, cross-ministry, stakeholder-engaged plan to end child sexual abuse in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises an issue that is critically important. It is one of the very reasons why this ministry exists, and that's to protect our children and youth from harm and to keep them safe. As the member said, there's no greater breach of trust than when someone that is known to a child interferes with them sexually or causes them harm through any other type of violence. We do work with nine ministries, and I can assure you that we will continue to do so on prevention, intervention, assessment, and treatment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since child sexual abuse is an issue many communities are very reluctant to discuss, what can the minister do to help break the veil of silence and prevent child sexual abuse?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, that is true. We have experienced that as well because child sexual abuse is a difficult subject to discuss, but it is still critically important to have that discussion with communities and focus on prevention. We do work closely with our stakeholders, with our community organizations. For example, we have 46 parent link centres across Alberta that offer resources and supports to parents. We will continue to support local strategies. Hon. member, I want you to know that this means that for your community as well there will be resources and support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister. Many in the community that work with child sexual abuse groups believe that work has been done in the domestic violence area that we can learn from. Can the minister tell us what collaborative efforts to end domestic violence have been in place, are they working, and if they are not, whether the minister can commit to a strategy to ensure that they will work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a 10-year provincial plan through the prevention of family violence and bullying strategy. It's currently in its seventh year. We have nine ministries that have been working closely with our community partners. Annually there's more than \$65 million that's allocated to this initiative. We continue to address our priorities to support our children and families in need. I want to thank you and I want to thank members of this Assembly for giving unanimous approval to our recent amendments to the Protection Against Family Violence Act because that will make a difference in a way that this member is talking about.

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

Oil and Gas Regulatory System

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am unnerved that the same member who introduced the health superboard as the health minister is now introducing an energy superboard in his proposed regulatory reform. The Alberta Liberals are supporters of aspects of reform, especially the one-window approval process and a reduction of red tape. But as the Environment critic I can tell the minister that environmental protection, monitoring, and compliance is not red tape. To the Minister of Energy: how does this energy superboard strengthen environmental protection and stewardship in Alberta? It didn't work very well in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, in health there's an Alberta Health Services board. There is no superboard. There is no superboard being proposed in this particular case. What is being proposed in the discussion paper that's tabled in this House is one single regulator to streamline the process in this province for major project approvals.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. It was your language. I used it.

Back to the same minister. Given that this will be the most powerful board in Alberta ever, dealing with approvals, carbon capture and storage, enhanced recovery schemes, all aspects of oil, natural gas, oil sands and coal, plus storage and disposal of water- and oil-filled waste formation, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, where are the checks and balances for the environment?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the issue that's laid out in this particular document won't necessarily change what happens today. What it'll do, however, is streamline, and it'll all be done in one process. Surely, this particular member isn't suggesting that we should make life more difficult when applications are before a series of regulators versus one streamlined process. As I said in the introduction of the draft discussion document, it is open for input, and I hope the member makes her points known.

Ms Blakeman: I expect you to make it better.

Back to the same minister. Given that this government already gets bad press for monitoring, for compliance enforcement, and for site reclamation and remediation, how does this superboard or proposal of his improve our record of poor performance?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear to this member that she's got it wrong. The concept of a single regulator is the on-the-ground administrative end of environmental protection: the policy development, the ability for the government to ensure that all of the policy, all of the rules that are being enforced by the regulator remain with the appropriate ministry, in this case Alberta Environment.

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

Livestock Traceability Pilot Project

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Work on a livestock traceability system has been initiated by the cattle industry for its value to an advanced food safety system and the potential to expand trade. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development recently released the results of a pilot project that examined the feasibility of traceability systems at Alberta auction markets. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What is the point of the pilot project, and did it meet its goals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's critical that we have a traceability system that doesn't impede the speed of commerce in the market that we have out there. Our project was in several key locations throughout our province, so we were able to test it all in areas of differing weather and the worst conditions, and we did it with about a quarter of a million cattle this past fall, with a 95 per cent read rate on traceability, which is great because we have huge markets we need to go after.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how much input did the livestock industry have on this project, and are their concerns being addressed?

Mr. Hayden: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with the Alberta Auction Markets Association and also with the individual auction markets. The pilot project was implemented, as I said, in the fall, and it included auction marts that went through very extreme weather conditions. They participated throughout the province, and we customized the reading systems to each of the areas where we installed them and used the unique approaches that were necessary for each of the auction marts. It worked very well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Can the minister quantify the potential benefit of a traceability system? Why is it important?

Mr. Hayden: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's important because it's a long-term investment. When the young people that are in our gallery today are out there in the working world by 2020, we will be one of six countries in the world that actually export food. We have the potential to do amazing things for those people that are going to need that food, but we need a traceability system, and we need the confidence of those markets to make it work right.

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

Education Funding

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has admitted that the Education budget is a hundred million dollars short of the funding needed to support an already struggling education system. These cuts compound the chaos created by last year's fiasco wherein teachers were laid off because of the government's refusal to make concrete funding commitments until the 11th hour. In the midst of Alberta's natural resource wealth how can the Minister of Education possibly justify his government's complete failure to ensure our children's future through the refusal to provide adequate, stable, and predictable funding to our schools?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the premise of that question is absolutely wrong. First of all, the system is not struggling. The system is well funded, well operating, and one of the top five in the world.

Mr. Chase: Say that in a staff room and see what happens.

Mr. Hancock: I have been in staff rooms. I was actually on Sunday and Monday with the College of Alberta School Superintendents. They understand that it's a tight year. They understand that we have to look at our operations. They understand that in a free and democratic society people are willing to pay taxes, but they expect those taxes to be used well. They understand that investment in education is one of the best things we can do, and this government understands that as well.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the \$100 million in education cuts will result in the loss of roughly 1,000 teaching

positions and given that the minister's hazy, empty, bureaucratic justifications are not going to make any of those administrators make ends meet, why won't the Minister of Education just admit that his government has sold him out and that they are leaving him and Alberta's children holding the bag for an impending crisis in education?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there's no impending crisis in education. Yes, it's a difficult year. A thousand teachers I think is a very, very significantly escalated estimate of how many teachers we might not have. Most of the situation will be dealt with by attrition in most of the boards across the province. It is going to be a tough year. Some of the class sizes may rise modestly. It's not going to be a disaster in education. It is a difficult year in education, no question. Would I have preferred to have had more resources to do some of the exciting things we could do? Yes. But as a government we're fiscally prudent, and we invest in our children in a very dramatic way.

Ms Notley: Well, given that funding for special-needs students has been frozen for three years and given that special-needs students will be among the hardest hit by the sudden reduction of professionals in the classroom, will the Minister of Education tell us if this is the legacy he and his Premier are so proud of, that their government has completely failed to prioritize the education of our most vulnerable children?

Mr. Hancock: Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. We've been working very, very strongly on our action and inclusion agenda to make sure that every child every day, no exceptions, is included in our education system and has the opportunity to maximize their potential. To suggest that school boards across this province would target the most needy and the most difficult students is absolutely ridiculous. No cuts have been made in spending for special-needs students. We have had a significant amount of funding in that area, we're looking at how we can use that funding better, and we have included an additional \$12 million in this year's budget so that we can implement the action on inclusion agenda.

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

Calgary Airport Trail Tunnel

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the city of Calgary is days away from, hopefully, finalizing a deal on the airport tunnel, but there is no guarantee until the deal is done and the ink has dried. Why is the city in this situation? Because of this province's wrongheaded decision not to support building an important access to Alberta's busiest airport. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why did the province continually refuse to support the airport tunnel, delaying work to the airport by years?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me first of all say that this is the responsibility of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He did ask about why we didn't support it before. We have supported municipalities to the tune of \$11.3 billion over 10 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister is just trying to pass the buck to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Given that without the construction of the airport tunnel the province's Deerfoot Trail will require major upgrades to handle

the increased traffic, has the minister's department studied whether upgrades to the Deerfoot or support for the airport would be more expensive?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say to you that we have built schools in Calgary. Those schools are placed in communities where it is most important, in the communities where children have access to be able to use the facilities and for parents to have schools in their areas. This is where the school boards feel that the schools are most important. Again, it's the responsibility of the city of Calgary to decide what their infrastructure should be.

Mr. Kang: We are talking about the airport tunnel, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about schools here.

To the minister again: given that short-term thinking more often causes long-term headaches, why would the minister not step up to provide support for this critical piece of infrastructure, construction that will not only save the province millions on upgrades on Deerfoot Trail but help make the Calgary ring road truly useful?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, \$3.3 billion going to Calgary for infrastructure over 10 years through MSI alone. The city of Calgary has the responsibility and the choice to decide where that funding should go. I would also like to talk about the hospitals, about the cancer institute that is taking place in Calgary, the amount of funding that is being put in place in that city and the choice that we're making for hospitals, for health care, for education. Let me reiterate that the tunnel is the responsibility of the city of Calgary.

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

Howse Pass Transportation Corridor

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Various groups in the province have recently been discussing the competitive nature of many of our industries, including trucking and transportation. Currently there are only a few routes to deliver Alberta goods to the west coast via truck and highways, the main route being the Kicking Horse Pass. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Are there any plans to develop an alternate route through the Howse Pass at any time in the future?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is all about opening up access to the west coast because it's important for our economy and it supports competitiveness. We need to look at building the most efficient transportation network that we possibly can. The Howse Pass alternative has been on the drawing board in one form or another for over 50 years, and I plan to bring this matter forward to my colleagues in British Columbia and Ottawa as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given the concern about safety, about energy efficiency, the carbon footprint, and other environmental impacts would it not make sense to finally develop the shortest, flattest, and most efficient route, that has been identified more than 200 years ago, for transporting goods through the Rockies?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with everything that the hon. member said. I support this route in principle. Some years ago this government and a number of central Alberta communities did a feasibility study on this route which clearly showed that the

route would have many benefits. However, most of the route lies within either British Columbia or the national park and is under the jurisdiction of British Columbia and the federal government. Obviously, we would need the co-operation of these governments before anything could get started.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if the federal government has the main jurisdiction over this corridor, what is the next step that we as the government of Alberta could take to get this back on the radar and see what could be done to expedite the Howse Pass transportation project?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping after what just happened a week ago that with a new majority Conservative government we can get this back on the radar. British Columbia and Alberta have two of the stronger economies in Canada, and a lot of goods and services move from here to the west coast and vice versa. This proposed highway would serve a national economic interest, and I plan to communicate this to the new federal minister as soon as I can. It's very important to plan for the future now because this will make both Alberta and Canada very strong.

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

Motor Vehicle Registry Database Access Fee

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently, when the budget came out, the PC government without consultation added a \$15 fee for when police officers issue tickets to violators. The municipalities are in fact faced with millions of dollars in fee increases, when in actual fact it's not \$15; it's about 99 cents. To the Minister of Service Alberta: is she working on trying to eliminate this fee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's really important to note with this fee increase that the municipalities will now pay that many other stakeholders were paying an \$11 fee. So it has been increased to \$15. At the same time, we were working with the municipalities to look for efficiencies on both sides to ensure that the IT system remains strong as it goes 24 hours, seven days a week. At the end of the day we want to be there to support the police when they're doing their good work.

2:40

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that the mayors and reeves I've spoken to indicate they're not at all pleased because they were not consulted, why did you surprise them and not consult with them in advance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was, indeed, part of the budget process that came out in February. All stakeholders were informed in March that there would be a change in this. I'm currently working with the five ministries involved, trying to work together to make sure that this is happening and to ensure that it's a good process and to look for opportunities to help them continue to get the revenue.

Mr. Boutilier: Given that charging more money is not a good process, I know that the minister of finance has indicated that he

was going to work towards eliminating this fee in his constituency. Has he made any new progress on this?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I said was that it's very important that we allow the municipalities to maintain the funding sources that they have now. We're going to work with them to make sure that the services we provide to that agency or to any other agencies or municipalities are done on a cost-recovery basis. This is one step along the road to making sure that those that actually break the law – photo radar or red light cameras or parking tickets – pay for the cost of collecting those tickets. It's fair to those who don't break the law.

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

Elder Abuse

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of Crime Prevention Week the Minister of Justice was in Calgary this morning to announce a grant for two invaluable organizations in that city that support victims of crime: the Kerby Centre and the YWCA. The grants will help establish an elder abuse response team and establish a program that will help reduce the risk of domestic violence and criminal involvement in children exposed to domestic violence. My first question to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: what assurances do Albertans have that this government is working to support victims of crime year-round and not just during Crime Prevention Week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fund that the hon. member is referring to is the safe communities innovation fund, or SCIF. That's a \$60 million fund that actually was set up in November of 2008. It's been active, and it's been supporting projects since that time. The two projects that the member refers to this are both innovative projects in Calgary, but these kinds of projects are happening all over the province, and the provincial government is supporting them. One of the hallmarks of the safe communities initiative is that they are community led, supported by government. People on the front lines with great ideas are being supported by the provincial government.

Another hallmark is that we're talking about early intervention, prevention, getting to the root causes of crime as opposed to just trying to arrest more people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given the unfortunate fact that our seniors are too often victims of abuse, especially financial abuse, what are you doing to protect Alberta seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this government is very supportive of community efforts and provincial policies that address elder abuse. Last November we released a strategy on elder abuse. This strategy provides a collaborative approach that government and community partners can take to prevent elder abuse. Over the last several years my ministry has worked very closely with the Elder Abuse Awareness Network to develop resources addressing the financial abuse of seniors. This information as well as other resources can be found on my ministry's website.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the Minister of Service Alberta: what practical resources does this government have to protect Albertans from becoming victims of fraud?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta has developed a number of resources and participates in many activities to promote fraud prevention awareness. One of the things that we do in partnership with the media is to issue consumer alerts when fraud happens. We also take a lot of calls at our consumer contact centre. Seniors call us on a lot of issues, and that's one of the major things we hear about. We also have many tipsheets available. Finally, we also do visit seniors' centres to talk about identity theft and how to protect your information.

Support for the Horse-racing Industry

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, since this Premier took office, \$156 million has been channelled to horse racing in Alberta, an industry headed by former Deputy Premier Shirley McClellan, an industry that everyone except this government seems to know is dying. To the President of the Treasury Board: how can this government justify channelling \$156 million to horse racing through a sweetheart casino deal while at the same time cutting education, cutting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, someone who just came into this Assembly and just looked at one side of the budget could be forgiven for not understanding it. For someone who has sat in this Assembly for as long as that hon. member to not understand or recognize the simple fact – Horse Racing Alberta provides slot machines that give them a percentage of revenue to support the industry. It does not come from the taxpayers. It flows through the government for an accounting principle only and does not come from the taxpayers of Alberta. It comes through from the people who play the slots.

Dr. Taft: My next question is to the Solicitor General. Given that this government has arranged the sweetheart deal that allows the money to flow and given that millions of those dollars have flowed to privately owned Rocky Mountain Turf Club in Lethbridge on condition that it maintain the buildings it uses at the Lethbridge exhibition, how is it, Mr. Solicitor General, that most of those buildings are in disrepair and some are condemnable?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member doesn't seem to listen to the first answer. The fact of the matter is that the government doesn't funnel any money to Horse Racing Alberta, nor does it manage any buildings at any racetracks or the operations of any private corporation. The revenue that he's talking about is generated because of slot machine revenue at 'racinos,' which are minicasinos located at racetracks. That business wouldn't be there if it wasn't for Horse Racing Alberta, and they keep a portion of the money. It's not taxpayers' money, and I don't oversee the operations of any private corporation out there.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, given that the line item for the budget is in the Solicitor General's budget and given that as far as I know, he's responsible for his budget, will the minister do the people of Alberta a favour and order a forensic audit of the lottery funds channelled to the Rocky Mountain Turf Club and call in the SPCA to inspect the barns and facilities to make sure that they're safe?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, if this was a library, that would be the fantasy department, soon to be the history department.

The Speaker: That concludes the question period for today. Seventeen members were recognized. There were 102 questions and responses.

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're coming to what I sense – and I only sense this – to be the conclusion of this session before too long. One of the things that is very important to do is to recognize the role played by pages. If you don't mind, I'd just like to have us do a recognition of the pages before we continue the Routine. [Standing ovation]

I wanted to read a very nice letter that I received from the retiring pages.

Mr. Speaker,

The end of Session signifies something different for everyone. For the Pages, the end of Session is accompanied by the realization that some of us will be moving on. We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the incredible opportunity we have had to serve the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

There are countless people who have shaped our experience into so much more than a job. We would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Table Officers, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the staff in 315, the Security Staff, and all the other staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. As well we wish to extend our gratitude to the Members of the Legislative Assembly, without whom our role in the Chamber would not exist.

Being a part of a team of so many talented individuals has been both a privilege and an honour. The opportunity to meet prestigious Albertans who have willingly shared their expertise with us is one that few are able to experience, and for this we are profoundly grateful. We leave this job with a better appreciation for the people who work so hard for our province.

As we reflect on our experiences at the Legislature, we recognize how fortunate we are to have had the opportunity to witness history firsthand. For no other part time job would we be able to see news in the making, before we turn on the TV or read the newspaper. We have been privileged to play a small role in our province's parliamentary system, and have gained a greater understanding and appreciation for the history and tradition of the democratic process. The memories and experiences we have gained have shaped us as individuals as we embark on our future endeavours.

It has been a great honour and pleasure to work with everyone in this Assembly, and for this we are deeply grateful.

Yours sincerely, Larissa Shapka, Brittany Bryce, Regan Coyne, Kelsy Edgerton, Matthew McGreer, Dmytro Muzychenko.

Thank you to them all.

Would the hon. Deputy Speaker continue the program?

2:50

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Deputy Speaker I would like to draw to the attention of all members that we will have to send off six of our wonderful pages at the end of this session, and they are, as the Speaker mentioned, Matthew McGreer, Regan Coyne, Kelsy Edgerton, Larissa Shapka, Brittany Bryce, and Dmytro Muzychenko.

I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the efforts of our pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with attention to duty and in good humour and suffer many late nights working with us. We are honoured to have our pages working with us in the Legislative Assembly to serve Alberta.

On behalf of all members here I present to each departing page a memento gift. These gifts are from the personal contributions of every member of our Assembly. Along with the gifts are our best wishes. I would like to ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to hand the gift to Kelsy Edgerton, representing the head page, Larissa Shapka, and our six departing pages. [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you. We'll continue with the Routine in a few seconds from now.

Hon. members, we have six members who are going to participate in Members' Statements today, and I do not want to interrupt the process. Government House Leader, do you want to ask the question if we can have unanimous consent to conclude the Routine?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you very much.

Members' Statements

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

Queen Elizabeth High School 50th Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth high school, which will be officially celebrated on June 11, 2011. It was a pleasure to have welcomed guests from the school in the Assembly today. These guests represent different generations who have been engaged in the school community either as a student, parent, volunteer, teacher, or principal.

Upon opening the doors for the first time in September of 1960, with 628 students in grades 10 through 12, Queen Elizabeth high school has grown today to serve over 1,300 students. Mr. Speaker, the school has successfully managed to maintain the feel of a small school community atmosphere and offer the same advantages of larger schools.

Queen Elizabeth high school endeavours to instill within their students the values of Queen Elizabeth, which include academics, athletics, arts, and active participation. These values are a very important part of the high school program and school culture; however, it is important to balance studies with leadership building as well as community participation and involvement. Queen Elizabeth high school challenges and encourages its students to find a balance between the two so that when the students graduate from this particular school, they are ready to be leaders in all of their endeavours.

Special thanks to the innovative and forward-looking staff at the school as they offer 21st century learning technologies which allow the students at Queen Elizabeth high school to interact with and learn from students around the world. This gives the students an incredible advantage, Mr. Speaker.

Queen Elizabeth high school has set itself apart from others in several other ways. They were the first school to offer hockey programming for credit and the first high school in Canada to offer an aviation program.

Special best wishes, congratulations, and heartfelt thank yous to all those who have contributed to student successes over the past 50 years at Queen Elizabeth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My schedule has the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, but the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, please proceed.

Patient Advocacy by Nurses

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be delivering the comments on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

As a physician it's been my honour, pleasure and part of my success to work with some of Alberta's finest nurses. This is National Nursing Week, and therefore an appropriate time to pay tribute to the hard work, compassion and dedication shown by Alberta's nurses.

But it must be noted that nurses have been asked to do more with less since the 1990s. Time and time again they have sacrificed their mental and physical health in order to cope with conflicting directions, government cutbacks and mismanagement of public health care. The culture of fear and intimidation created by this government compromises patient care and affects all health care professionals, including nurses.

And yet they speak out for their patients, advocating for better care even in the face of threats and intimidation from their managers. Today we heard the story of one nurse who experienced post-traumatic stress disorder and long-term disability because of the treatment she received after speaking out repeatedly for the patients in her care.

Nurses should be applauded for patient advocacy, not punished. In this case, a nurse with nearly twenty-five years service has left her career behind, and Alberta is the poorer for it.

Health care professionals – nurses, doctors, social workers, technicians, everyone – must work in an environment of trust, respect and sound management. But that's not what [we're] getting. . . Nurses deserve far more respect than this government has shown, and they deserve a full, independent, judicial public inquiry to uncover the truth about countless allegations of intimidation.

We cannot fix health care without addressing the fundamental problems of a public health care work environment that has become toxic for all concerned.

Our nurses deserve better. Their patients deserve better. And this government must do better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Parks Public Safety Team

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Tourism, Parks and Recreation Public Safety Team, which has been operating out of Kananaskis Country for more than 30 years, keeping Albertans and visitors safe. Our three public safety specialists are internationally certified mountain guides and professional members of the Canadian Avalanche Association.

The Kananaskis region is more than 26,000 square kilometres, and with a wide range of terrain to cover, the team has trained in all aspects of search and rescue. They're on call 24/7, 365 days a year for any type of emergency, and when needed, they assist in operations across the province from the Rocky Mountains down to Cypress Hills. They are also responsible for training the conservation officers who support them when they respond to public safety incidents.

An important responsibility is their extensive avalanche program. From November to the end of April every year they provide the public with daily avalanche bulletins, and they also provide the avalanche control program along sections of our provincial highways.

They respond to more than 350 incidents every year, and over the past 30-plus years they've responded to more than 10,000 incidents, including lost or missing persons; climbing rescues; avalanches; lakes and river rescues; skiing accidents; horse, bicycle, motor vehicle, and off-highway motor vehicle incidents;

wildlife-human confrontations; and just about any other incident you can imagine.

This winter they started using Facebook and Twitter to get important information to the public immediately. Their Facebook site has logged nearly 400,000 visits since January 1, and there are hundreds of followers on Twitter.

I want to congratulate this team for their incredible dedication and skill and the compassion they show in their work, keeping my constituents and so many other Albertans and visitors from around the world safe every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Seniors' Week

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to all members about an annual event that's very important to me, Seniors' Week. Every year during the first week of June we set aside time to celebrate and honour the contributions of our seniors.

This year's theme, Vibrant Leaders in the Community, reflects the many roles that seniors play in our province as our parents, our grandparents, employers and employees, volunteers, and caregivers, and in these roles and more seniors continue to be leaders in our community.

As our population ages, the rising number of seniors will contribute to a growing pool of knowledge, wisdom, and experience that's invaluable to our communities. We need to recognize this and pay tribute to seniors for all they do.

3:00

Events and festivities will be happening across the province from June 6 to 12, and I'm pleased that the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta co-ordinates and supports these events. Though our work focuses on raising government awareness of the issues and concerns regarding seniors in our province, we know that it's equally important to recognize and celebrate successes. That's why one of the highlights of the week for me is the minister's seniors' service awards. Presented by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, these awards recognize Albertans who volunteer their time to make a difference in the lives of our seniors. This year over 60 nominations were received.

Award recipients will be honoured at a special ceremony in Edmonton during Seniors' Week. There are numerous other events occurring that week, and I encourage all members and all Albertans to take part in these celebrations. To find a calendar of events in your area, visit the Alberta Seniors and Community Supports website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Tianna Rissling Peter Schori

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the overabundance of water over the last two years has anything to do with this, and we in southeast Alberta certainly are not growing webs between our toes, but I'm pleased to rise today and brag to you about a constituent of mine, Tianna Rissling from Redcliff, along with her coach, Peter Schori. These two have just qualified for the World Swimming Championships in Shanghai, China, from July 24 to 31 this summer.

Tianna qualified by finishing second at the world championship trials in Victoria in April. Peter was named to the coaching staff based on her performance. Tianna is currently ranked 10th in the world for the 100 breaststroke. Tianna and Peter are the only swimmer or coach on the world championship team not from a major city, which is quite an achievement. They come from the Alberta Marlin Aquatic Club, which swims out of Medicine Hat.

The Alberta Marlin Aquatic Club is the number one swim club in Alberta outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Nationally in 2010 the club had swimmers on the Canadian senior national, the junior national, and the national prospects team. Provincially eight swimmers from AMAC were on Alberta provincial teams. Forty swimmers qualified for Alberta championships. They have over 100 swimmers in their competitive and precompetitive programs. As well, Mr. Speaker, every AMAC swimmer to continue swimming through grade 12 in the past eight years has pursued their postsecondary education. In 2010-2011 seven AMAC swimmers will compete for Canadian and American universities on full or partial scholarships.

The 2011 world championships will feature all five aquatic disciplines – swimming, water polo, diving, open water, and synchronized swimming – and 22 countries will come to compete. Portions of this championship will most likely serve as part of the qualifying for the 2012 Summer Olympics. I'd like to pass on my best to both Tianna and Peter for a successful event. I am confident we will hear many good things from them in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore

Government Accountability

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I reflect on what has gone on in this province since December of 2006, I have to say it is very disappointing. During the last leadership race our now-Premier and his opponents started down the socialist path of tax more and spend more. With the new royalty framework they promised to increase taxes and increase spending, a promise they kept to our detriment. They now declare loudly that it is a great time to spend on infrastructure, but they still fail to apologize for the billions that they blew when it was not a good time to spend.

A month before they entered the March 2008 election they announced \$1.2 billion in vote-buying schemes on top of signing an unaffordable \$4.4 billion contract with the teachers to fund their share of the unfunded pension liability. It typified this government's cavalier attitude towards taxpayers: spend now and have our children pay later.

Not long after the election the Premier and his cabinet colleagues gave themselves a massive wage increase, setting in motion a demand by all other public employees. Once again, this is leadership of the poorest quality. They say that those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

My question to the Premier would be: is there a country in which central government has worked? Of course not. But this government willfully ignores the painful lessons of history.

What about free speech? They have a zero-tolerance policy on MLAs who speak out on behalf of Albertans. Those who do are kicked out. Their culture of silence extends beyond the confines of the caucus room and into our valued public institutions, health care being the worst. Their centralization and consolidation of power and money have undermined the Alberta advantage. We have seen legislation which grants the government arbitrary authority to shred contracts and violate landowner rights without full compensation or recourse to the courts.

Mr. Speaker, only in Alberta could we survive as long as we have with such an incompetent and fiscally irresponsible government. Any other province would have gone broke a long time ago.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. We're on petitions.

Mr. Mason: Petitions, yes, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: I have a petition that I would like to present. It reads as follows:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to provide full funding to open the urgent care and family practice sections of the East Edmonton Health Centre no later than March 1, 2011.

The petition has 95 signatures, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have approximately a thousand signatures on a petition that reads:

We, the undersigned . . . [wish] the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing the funding to the Ministry of Education so that sustainable and adequate funding is provided to address the needs of every student, every day, no exceptions.

Thank you very much.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 208 Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2011

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 208, the Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2011.

Bill 208 is substantial legislation to secure public health care in Alberta. The bill interprets the Canada Health Act to ensure that key principles such as comprehensiveness, universality, accessibility, and portability, vital to all Albertans are strengthened. It would amend several Alberta acts in doing this. The provisions of this bill address what Albertans are really saying they want, things the NDP caucus heard in its health care hearings, with meaningful content and not vague platitudes.

This bill would help ensure that the mess we're seeing with health care services now in Alberta will not happen again. These provisions include an explicit prohibition on extra billing. It would ensure that no health facility could provide preferred access to insured services for those who pay. The law already prohibits such preferred access to insured surgical procedures. The bill would extend that protection to all insured health services. It would guarantee access to real long-term care and home care for those who require it.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years important health services have been moved out of many communities, forcing people to go to Edmonton or Calgary for treatment. This bill would require the government to set out which services will be available in regional facilities throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, we need to stop the attack on public health care. Bill 208 expands insured health services by requiring the minister to present to the Legislature a comprehensive plan, including cost estimates, to meet two key objectives to improve health care: first, a prescription drug program that would ensure that access to drugs is not impeded by costs; and second, insured coverage for all dental services, except for cosmetic dental services, for those under 18 years of age or over 64 years of age.

An effective public health service would ensure that services are not only publicly funded but, as much as possible, publicly delivered as well. This bill would ensure that within five years all insured surgical procedures would be delivered in public or not-for-profit facilities.

The sustainability of our health system has been threatened by the lack of planning for infrastructure, capital spending, and human resources. Bill 208 would establish a health planning council so that planning is co-ordinated with clear timelines.

Finally, the bill would make the health care system more accountable by bringing transparency to the health budget and ensuring that the public is consulted through elected regional health advisory bodies.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about the health services Albertans need and deserve.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

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

3:10 Bill 209 Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would move for leave to introduce a bill, that being Bill 209, the Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, tailings ponds are a picture worth a thousand words of the struggle between developing Alberta's energy sector in the oil sands and environmental protection and stewardship. Given that, trillions of words are now across the world showing Alberta with huge, huge tailings ponds and more being added.

The government has created directive 074 through the ERCB to set out expectations and requirements on reducing existing and reducing the creation of additional tailings ponds. Bill 209 is designed to complement that, to strengthen the direction of it, and to close some of the loopholes that exist. One of the things that it does is require that the ERCB must prepare a report on directive 074 and include such things as every instance of an operator failing to meet the reduction of fluid tailings stipulated in directive 074; every instance where a project has significant changes to its overall tailings planned management under directive 074; any amendment granted by the board to a plan for a dedicated disposal area, an overall tailings management plan, or an annual tailings management plan, and the reasons for granting that amendment; as well as any instance where an operator has failed to meet or to submit a tailings management plan. And that includes dates that go along with each of those.

Amending the Oil Sands Conservation Act. Bill 209, the Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2011, also sets out that there would be a report on directive 074 which would be delivered to the minister responsible and tabled in the Assembly. As part of that it would include that there would be no amendment, including repeal, Mr. Speaker, to directive 074 that could be made without the board publishing a notice of any proposed

changes on a public website and the minister's departmental website, that the notice would comply with various parts of the section. Specifically, what I'm looking for there is that there would be a publication of the proposed amendment, that there would be a period that is set out very clearly for the public to give reaction to the proposed amendment, and that there would be a very clear closing date for the public feedback session as well as any other information that the board considers, and that those comments would then be reported to the minister with recommendations on what changes the board considers appropriate.

The last two points. There's also a very specific section on noncompliance, which requires that no amendment or waiver to the phase-in sequence of the reduction in fluid tailings or to the overall tailings management plan by an operator would be granted unless the operator can demonstrate extraordinary circumstances or undue hardship. That's trying to close one of those loopholes I was talking about. As well, it requires that any information submitted by an operator concerning compliance with directive 074 may be made public by the board itself.

I'm very proud of this bill, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to debating it in the fall session. As I said, I move first reading of Bill 209.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of my responses to Written Question 2 and Written Question 19, both raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

For Written Question 2 I was pleased to indicate that all groups that have previously received funding through the Wild Rose program are indeed eligible to apply to the community initiatives program.

For Written Question 19 I was pleased to correct the member's error regarding the amount of government funding provided and, further, to direct her to the Alberta Creative Hub corporation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As minister responsible for housing and homelessness in this province I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a recent Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness report. The report is titled Ending Homelessness in Medicine Hat and clearly outlines how the people of Medicine Hat can be proud of their community's collaborative work to foster, leverage, and deliver Housing First support to those most in need of help and, of course, with the province's assistance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to table the appropriate number of copies of 157 letters of support for the upgrading and modernization of Trochu Valley school. The letters are all in support of that project. This is also a project that is the number one priority of the Golden Hills school division and also the number one priority of myself.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, three on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition and two on behalf of myself. I'm tabling on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition five copies of a letter from Terri Reuser, a nurse subjected to bullying and intimidation forcing her on sick leave and out of her work, and also copies of letters to Dr. Kevin Taft and Mr. Harry Chase thanking them for their extraordinary service to Albertans, this House, and the Alberta Liberal caucus.

On behalf of myself I am tabling five copies of letters from Michelle Tyslau and Sheryl Trimble, who are both upset about the education cuts, and in the case of Sheryl she will be losing her job.

I'm also tabling five copies of letters on behalf of Brent Harris from Calgary and Ann McLaughlin from Edmonton, who are more than upset about the clear-cutting that is happening in the Castle special area. Certainly, for someone who has spent the last 43 years recreating in that area, I too am more than upset.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling e-mails from the following individuals who have taken the time to write to us about their concerns for the future of education in our great province: Tina Smith, Charlotte Moller, Carol Sparks, Julie Nicholls, Leslie Chapman, and Ken Yasenchuk. I do have the appropriate number of copies.

I also am tabling letters from the following individuals who shared their concerns about our health care system with us. Those are Heather Millington, Sandra Caines, Kristine Wretham, and Caron McBride.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: I am so glad you recognized me, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of my response to the questions raised during the review of Employment and Immigration's estimates in the Standing Committee on the Economy meeting which took place on March 14, 2011.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter received by the Alberta NDP opposition from Nicole Thulien, who is in grade 8 in Veteran school. Nicole is concerned that provincial education budget cuts will mean the school will have to teach three grades in one classroom next year, and she's concerned that the quality of education at Veteran school will suffer if it loses any more of its teachers.

As well, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of postcards received by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood signed by constituents who want to ensure that Catholic education in Alberta is preserved and that the government provides "adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for the education of . . . our children, without any dependency on fundraising by parents or children."

Then, thirdly, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of postcards received by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood signed by constituents who are urging the government to reverse the funding cut to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Weadick, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to questions raised by Dr. Taft, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on April 12, 2011, in Department of Advanced Education and Technology main estimates debate.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the point at which Ministerial Statements was introduced today and prior to the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs rising, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre rose on a point of order. I know what the point of order is going to be. I would like to sum up this matter and deal with it with the concluding statements that I make, so brief comments, please.

Point of Order

Advance Notice of Ministerial Statements

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for recognizing me. I appreciate that the Speaker has been able to give me a little bit of advice. Aside from a direct citation, I can say from long experience in this House that I believed it to be protocol at best and good manners at the very least that ministers doing a ministerial statement would provide a copy of that statement to the Official Opposition and, one would hope, to other opposition members. Today the Official Opposition was notified there would be a ministerial statement done by the minister of housing, but when we requested it, we were told it would not be provided.

Our problem, Mr. Speaker, is that we do not have the same amount of resourcing available to us. It's very hard for us to assign members or staff to be writing a response to a ministerial statement when we don't know what the content of it is, we don't know the tone of it, we don't know the direction of it. It makes it very difficult for us, and our staff is already stressed trying to accommodate being asked to do many different things. So this caused an additional stress in our caucus staff today that we, frankly, just didn't need. There is no database of Speaker's rulings that I could access, so I prevailed directly on the institutional memory of the Speaker himself, if he could give us a reference or provide some clarity in this matter.

I would say that at the very least it's good manners to provide us. It doesn't cost the members anything to provide a statement of what they're going to present. To not do so I just found unnecessarily churlish.

Thank you.

Mr. Denis: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's comments about good manners. I know she always endeavours to utilize good manners herself.

Beauchesne's 349 says, "It is the tradition and a courtesy for Ministers to advise their opposition critics," as we did, "when it is intended to make a ministerial statement in the House." It also says, "Nevertheless, failure to adhere to this [procedure] does not prevent a Minister from making a statement." Well, Mr. Speaker, we did advise at 9:13, as the member mentioned. We did receive the member's call at roughly 1 o'clock. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo had phoned over. We did indicate what the subject of the statement was.

I also refer you to the procedural orientation manual, page 18, section 6.

Ministers may make statements or announcements under this heading. As a courtesy, the Minister's office or Executive Council usually provides a copy to the Opposition Leader prior to the commencement of the day's sitting.

It says "usually." It doesn't say that they shall.

A Member of the Official Opposition, by convention, is entitled to a three-minute response, which they gave. Again, it says "usually provides." It doesn't say "is required to provide" or "shall provide."

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I mean no ill will to this member or the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I want to commend the member's comment on good manners, which she always follows, and I would like to apologize for any inconvenience to her.

The Speaker: Just a couple of brief comments. This matter did come up in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as long ago as 1984, when the then Speaker, Mr. Amerongen, said:

It's not a matter that I could deal with as being a matter of right.

It would perhaps be something which falls [far] short of that. I don't think there's any requirement in the Standing Orders that that be done. I would have to leave it to the good sense of the members involved.

That was said in 1984.

However, on October 4, 1993, the following was stated by the then Deputy Premier and then Government House Leader:

It is the intent of the government . . . that in essence we would like to have delivered from members of our Executive Council to the Leader of the [Official] Opposition a copy of such ministerial statements as much in advance as we possibly can. Our definition of "as much in advance as we possibly can" is normally in the area of 45 minutes.

By coincidence, that Deputy Premier and Government House Leader is the person standing before you now. That was a statement made 18 years ago, in 1993.

In the most recent documentation, the procedural manual that we put out to all members on procedural orientation, the recent copy of which was published in the fall of 2009, on page 18 it deals with the daily Routine under the subject matter of ministerial statements, identified as section 6.

Ministers may make statements or announcements under this heading. As a courtesy, the Minister's office or Executive Council usually provides a copy to the Opposition Leader prior to the commencement of the day's sitting. A Member of the Official Opposition, by convention, is entitled to a three-minute response to every Ministerial Statement.

Now, these are statements we've used by convention in our House going back to 1993, so all the stuff that comes out of all these learned journals that have been published around the world, please remember, while important, is of a secondary nature to the rules we make in this Assembly for ourselves. It's just good courtesy and civility and being nice to one another. That's all.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Bill 20

Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011

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 very much, Mr. Chair. Yesterday I made it very clear on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus that we were very supportive of Bill 20, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011, which extends the coverage of benefits, particularly for carcinogens, cancer-causing agents, from professional firefighters now to volunteer firefighters. It's a very good concept, and we're very supportive of it.

Mr. Chair, I would like to emphasize the importance of further extending this coverage, and that is to all first responders, whether they be the police on site who secure the scene, whether they're the paramedics that provide the backup. These individuals, whether they're professionals or the volunteers that support the police or the firemen, should receive similar coverage because they are on the same site, experiencing the same potential threats. I made that point, and I'd like to emphasize that point.

A second point that I wish to see at some point further to where Bill 20 has left off is the establishment of counselling for firefighters and not just for firefighters, whether they're volunteer or professional, but for all first responders in terms of posttraumatic stress syndrome counselling. A number of individuals, because of the experiences they have, whether it's pulling a victim out of a burning building or responding to a horrendous accident, are traumatized by the repeated experience. We saw this with I think it was the volunteer department out of Boyle on highway 63, that could no longer take the experience of the number of fatalities and the carnage experienced on highway 63. So I would like to see posttraumatic stress syndrome covered, counselling provided, as it is for all armed forces members and as it is for members of the RCMP.

3:30

In passing along the equivalent compensation and recognition for volunteer firefighters, the majority of whom – the number that the minister provided yesterday was approximately 10,000. He mentioned that there are 3,500 professionals in Alberta's cities and approximately 10,000 volunteers who risk their lives and provide a wonderful service in a variety of ways in rural jurisdictions.

There is a bit of a problem, Mr. Chair, and I want to address that problem. In the rural circumstances it's reasonable to assume that a number of these volunteer firefighters are farmers, and it is reasonable to assume that a number of these volunteer firefighters are also paid farm workers because they're in that area and providing the service. The shame, I would suggest the disgrace is that if these paid farm workers are hurt while helping to recover from an accident scene or if they are hurt while fighting a fire or providing emergency service, they will be covered. However, on the paid farms, the factory farms that they work, they don't have that same type of workmen's compensation. So they are considered, basically, second-class citizens. This is the only province that does not recognize the need for compensation for paid farm workers.

I do not know whether Kevan Chandler, who died in a silo on a factory farm, volunteered for the Black Diamond or Turner Valley fire department. But I am aware and I want to thank the Member for Foothills-Rocky View and a teaching colleague friend of mine, who actually ran against the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, and that's Herb Coburn, who lives out in Springbank, for putting together a fundraiser that helped the widow of Kevan Chandler.

Farm workers and their families, when they're injured or killed, should not be dependent on charity. They are doing a job, a valued job, and they need to be covered by workmen's compensation.

To summarize, Mr. Chair, we need to extend the type of compensation that Bill 20 provides to volunteer firefighters to all first responders, whether they be police or paramedics; we need to recognize the need for volunteer firefighters, police, and paramed-

ics to have posttraumatic stress syndrome counselling and support from the WCB; and thirdly, whether they work on a volunteer fire department or not, farm workers must be recognized for their contribution and receive workmen's compensation.

Mr. Chair, it is a disgrace that in this wonderful country we are the only province that does not provide compensation for paid farm workers. That has to change. Whether it becomes Bill 21 in the fall or any other number, I hope to see it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief. This is a good-news story for those people who volunteer in our firefighting departments throughout this province. It extends them workmen compensation benefits that would be extended to a regular "firefighter" or person who's actively engaged in the line of duty, which is exactly what these people are. They are people we need to cover because they're doing a valuable service to us, and they should be recognized in kind.

I applaud the minister for bringing this forward. I hope he can look at other avenues to extend WCB coverage in like circumstances to people who deserve to be covered, of course, that goes without saying, the people who are paid farm workers, and the really fairly simple notion that if you're doing work on a farm or an industrial farm, you should be covered. It's not too hard to follow the logic along with that. Sometimes the mental gymnastics that I see being used by this government to get out of funding that option is actually borderline ridiculous.

Nevertheless, I think this is a good-news story today, talking about the extension of benefits to our volunteer firefighters. Hopefully, common sense will prevail on other situations that are similar to this, and we'll see dignity restored to many people in this province. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this very important bill. Before I make my remarks, I have to comment on the remarks made by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. Perhaps I should have spent more time briefing him, as my critic, on the content of this bill. I thought it was abundantly obvious that the reason that this presumptive cancer legislation was extended to firefighters, first to full-time professional and now to part-time volunteer professional firefighters, is because of the fact that scientific evidence that is available clearly shows that these firefighters are exposed to chemicals, to substances, to agents, to molecules that appear to have a causal relationship with the development of the 14 cancers which are now covered by this bill.

The reason they're exposed to it is because they actually enter fire, enter where the combustion takes place, and are exposed to the smoke and to the combustion at very high temperatures. No other profession at this point has the scientific evidence that can show us that, indeed, their profession exposes them to such agents. Hence, police officers and paramedics, obviously, are not in a position that is similar to this, but if the member has any evidence or scientific data that indicates that they are, I will be the first one that would gladly look at it.

Today, Mr. Chairman, I rise to respond to the comments put forward yesterday in the Assembly regarding Bill 20, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011. I have to tell you that I was extremely gratified to hear the positive comments and support

for this bill from my colleagues on both sides of this Assembly. The 10,000 part-time volunteer firefighters serving today in Alberta deserve the same level of support from the WCB and the same coverage as their full-time counterparts enjoy. We are pleased to be able to bring this proposed change forward.

Bill 20 proposes to extend WCB coverage for 14 presumptive cancers to volunteer firefighters throughout Alberta. They risk everything to protect their neighbours and their communities, so it makes sense that we back them with solid compensation coverage in the event that they fall ill as a result of their work. That's what really matters. At the end of the day verbal support for firefighters with cancer goes only so far; actions speak much louder. What they also need is financial support and peace of mind for themselves and, obviously, their families at a crucial time, and that's what we are offering here by this Bill 20.

Mr. Chair, I want to address the question that arose yesterday surrounding cost. That's always very important. Cost for any claims that might arise should any of our volunteer firefighters, unfortunately, develop cancer as a result of their work would be paid by the WCB, just like any other claim. There is no cost to the taxpayers of Alberta. WCB premiums for volunteer firefighters are already paid by their employers, which are the municipalities where they work.

The changes to the WCB coverage contained in Bill 20 are in keeping with what some jurisdictions in Canada have already done. We do not expect that the premiums for municipalities will be affected by providing volunteer firefighters with the same coverage as their full-time counterparts. In fact, both the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Mr. Chairman, passed resolutions urging this government to do exactly what Bill 20 proposes to do.

At the end of the day this is not about dollars and cents. This is about protecting those who are running towards danger while most of us are running away from it.

3:40

Further, Mr. Chairman, on the question of the WCB's awareness of this proposal my answer is: yes, the WCB most definitely is aware of Bill 20. I can assure you that many of them actually are listening to us as we're speaking today. Consultations have been held with the WCB to ensure it was involved every step of the way. There is no way to know how many volunteer firefighters are going to qualify for this particular coverage. Of course, my sincere hope is that no firefighter ever qualifies for this coverage because that would mean that they haven't developed cancer.

The question yesterday regarding farm workers is somewhat outside of the realm of this bill. It's not unusual for some members to venture into matters that are totally irrelevant to the topic of discussion. I have to tell you that this proposal simply seeks to extend the same coverage for 14 presumptive cancers that already exist for full-time firefighters to volunteer firefighters. This is done not only because it is the right thing to do, but it's as a result of a number of new studies that point to a strong relationship between firefighters and what they do and the development of certain types of cancer.

Mr. Chair, I value the effort of Alberta's farm and ranch workers as much as anyone. However, Agriculture and Rural Development recently announced the establishment of a new farm safety council, that is working to improve health and safety on farms and ranches, including representatives from all sides of this issue.

There was also a comment from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, about whether we should be extending this coverage to other professions, much like the Member for Calgary-Varsity has indicated, that might come into contact with harmful

substances. Mr. Chairman, the occupational health and safety legislation sets out limits for toxic contaminants such as lead, cadmium, and magnesium. Workers should not be exposed to levels that exceed the limits. If workers' exposure may be higher than the limit, then control measures are required to protect them.

Finally, Mr. Chair, regarding coverage for paramedics for post-traumatic stress I can only say that today's bill is not the end of the process of continually improving WCB coverage for workers in Alberta. We're always seeking ways to improve coverage and respond to new research and are already open to further discussion with other professions. Having been myself involved in the capacity as a first responder in a fatal accident, I can tell you that indeed it does affect the persons that are involved. I am open to entering into discussions with the first-responder professions. These people are our friends and our neighbours. That is why it is especially important and gratifying for me to hear our rural members voice their support and, in fact, lead this drive.

I have to tell you that the Member for Rocky Mountain House has definitely been very active on this file in promoting the extension of this coverage to volunteer firefighters, and I would like to thank him right now for his leadership on this particular file. He has kept my feet to the fire and definitely advocated on their behalf behind the scenes. We all admire and respect our volunteers, like the member does, and we all want to do whatever we possibly can, Mr. Chairman, for them in terms of proper compensation coverage should they fall ill as a result of serving the communities.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank again all members of this Legislature for their support of this bill. I hope you all vote in favour of it. I have to tell you that your firefighters, particularly in the rural communities, communities that are primarily served by volunteer firefighters, will be thankful. Aside from the fact that it is the right thing to do, I have to tell you that it is the smart thing to do. We all know that attracting and retaining volunteer professional firefighters is a challenge. This will be one piece towards assisting municipalities in their continuous effort to attract and retain firefighters.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this bill for the first time. I want to join what I'm sure is the majority of other speakers who've risen to speak about it in providing our support for the decision that was made to expand presumptive coverage to volunteer firefighters. I think that the concept of presumptive coverage is exceptionally important in the world of workers' compensation because the morass of establishing your case for complex compensable injuries is incredibly stressful and challenging to injured workers. Those few workers who benefit from the presumption, limited as it is in this province, enjoy a tremendous benefit.

There's no question that those people who commit to first responder work in the form of being firefighters are people to whom we owe a great deal of gratitude and our support. The rationale that's come forward in terms of including volunteer firefighters I think is certainly a very wise consideration because it's very clear that these folks are actually getting similar if not greater levels of exposure to the very hazards which underlie the decision to provide for this particular presumption.

So I congratulate the government, and I also congratulate the firefighters themselves for the good work that they have done and that they continue to do on behalf of their members in terms of advocating for their members' health and safety. I do think and believe and hope, anyway, that the successes that the firefighters

are able to achieve for their members may well at least start to teach an otherwise recalcitrant government about the nature of health and safety and chemical exposure and gradual, progressive injury in the workplace such that other professionals may, hopefully, at some point experience similar levels of success in establishing presumptive levels.

Because this is, you know, an important issue, I think it is actually wise to talk about other people who might be covered by this kind of presumption. I think that that is within the ambit of this bill because we're talking about the whole concept of presumptive coverage. I think one member has talked about the issue of stress and posttraumatic stress as it relates not only to firefighters but other first responders and the degree to which we are able to provide that kind of support to people who are typically forced to deal with very traumatic situations as part of their work.

I remember that there used to be a principle in workers' compensation law which was referred to as voluntary assumption of risk and the idea was: well, you signed up for this dangerous work; you knew when you signed up for it, so you're responsible for the greater hazards that you're subjected to. Certainly, by moving to this type of presumptive situation, we are starting to chip away at that very antiworker and very old-fashioned legal concept, which only exists in the most conservative of courtrooms these days. It's an important issue because we have other first responders who also are subjected to tremendous amounts of stress and, quite reasonably, suffer from forms of stress and post-traumatic stress, whether we're talking about paramedics, whether we're talking about police officers, whether we're talking about health care workers.

It may not be something that the minister is aware of, but in fact the people most likely to suffer from a violent attack in their workplace are not actually police officers, are not actually firefighters, are not actually . . . [interjection] One might think it would be the NDP opposition, but we move fast, and we've avoided getting a lot of contact. They are, in fact, health care workers. Health care workers in this province and in every province are statistically, without question, far and away the most likely to be the victims of violent offences in their workplace. People who work in emergency rooms are commonly subjected to extremely stressful situations where they find themselves feeling as though their life is actually at risk and where also they are forced to see other people's lives very much at risk, and that stress level is very common.

3:50

Interestingly, the people most likely to suffer from some type of injury in the workplace are people who work in a form of psychiatric care or in long-term care, and in that case the victim is most likely a female health care worker, and the perpetrator inadvertently is mostly likely to be male and above a certain age. It's usually associated, you know, with senility of some form, so it's a function of their illness. Nonetheless, that's what the statistics show. That's who is getting injured. That's the severity of their injury. That's the consistency of their injury. Yet they have to fight tooth and nail to get workers' compensation benefits in this province.

If they actually suffer from some type of emotional reaction as a result of being victims of this type of violence, they had better have themselves one heck of a good lawyer because there is no presumption that works in their favour. Those people, who make up a huge number of claimants and potential claimants to workers' compensation, go uncompensated under our current system. That's one of the places where we need to look at extending some type of presumptive coverage.

Now, the minister said: well, there's actually no evidence to suggest that other professionals are subjected to particular hazards in their workplace. Well, I will tell you as someone who worked in this area for many years that that's simply untrue. I mean, I've talked about violence in the workplace, but there are piles and piles and piles of studies out there about the hazards associated with working with a number of different chemicals that, again, are commonly found within our health care settings, the hazards associated with working with a number of different chemicals associated with our oil and gas sector, the hazards associated with working at a number of different jobs and tasks within the construction industry. There are buckets of studies out there that show that there is a clear relationship between particular occupations and particular diseases as a result of what people are exposed to.

This government has stubbornly refused to acknowledge many, many, many of those cases. The minister suggested that when it comes to chemicals and people who are exposed to chemicals who work in other professions, they can enjoy the benefit of the limits which exist in health and safety. Now, that's interesting because, of course, we've seen a lot of evidence about how we're not effectively enforcing our health and safety rules across the province in a broad range of worksites. That's one thing.

Another thing is that even where we do find that a worker has been exposed to chemicals in excess of what the regulations suggest are optimum or legal, that person still has to go to the Workers' Compensation Board and hire a lawyer because, of course, we have no bloody legal aid in this province and spend tens of thousands of dollars on medical support in order to establish that that illegal exposure to a certain chemical is connected to the illness that they suffer. There's absolutely no presumption that if you are exposed to an illegal amount of a particular toxic chemical, it will be assumed that the illness that you subsequently get is related to that exposure. That doesn't exist. You can show illegality on the part of the employer and still have to spend tens of thousands of dollars on legal fees to get the Workers' Compensation Board to accept your illness as being something that is deserving of compensation.

The other thing that doesn't exist within our system is that we have ridiculously easy limits when it comes to chemical exposure. Most other jurisdictions have much more rigorous limits and bans on chemical exposure than does the province of Alberta. One of the things that we don't do a good job of is looking at the cumulative effects of multiple chemical exposure. Does that result in the amount of chemical exposure that a person can tolerate having to be reduced if they're exposed to it in concert with two or three other chemicals at the same time? Other jurisdictions have done a lot of work on that issue. Alberta has not. We really, really do have a lot of work to do in this area in Alberta.

The only other area that I'll try and mention very quickly is the area of repetitive strain. Again, in other jurisdictions we have presumptive and quasi-presumptive pieces of legislation that outline that for certain people engaged in certain occupations and certain tasks, when they subsequently suffer from a variety of different repetitive strain injuries and diseases, it will be assumed that that repetitive strain injury or disease is related to their work. We have these types of presumptive and quasi-presumptive relationships in other jurisdictions across the country, but once again we don't have them in Alberta.

Once again, we have a number of workers in Alberta who suffer from injury in the workplace as a result of repeated exposure to unsafe conditions and struggle to have that injury recognized by the Workers' Compensation Board, an organization which at this point, frankly, ought to consider renaming itself the workers' denial board or something like that. The WDB we could call it

here in Alberta. It's actually not the workers' denial board; it's the employers' denial board. So we could call it the EDB, I guess, because that's really how it functions in this province and has done ever since we had a judicial inquiry actually recommending some wholesale changes to how our workers' compensation system works, which this government ignored, around 2004, 2005 I think it was.

Anyway, I digress, but it does all relate to the issue of how well we take care of those people who go to work every day in this province and expect to be able to do so safely and to come home to their families – to their husbands, to their wives, to their kids – and to do so in one piece and healthy and able to live their lives. We have a lot of work to do on that in this province. We are not doing a good job of it at all in this province. While I am very pleased for this particular piece of legislation and, once again, very pleased on behalf of the firefighters, who greatly deserve this recognition, and I don't want to detract at all from the success that they've achieved here, I think that they would agree with me and join with me in the call for this government to do much more for the vast majority of workers throughout Alberta.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hehr: I thank you for acknowledging me. I will speak, Mr. Chair, one more time. Again, I've said on the record here in committee that this is generally a good-news story, but after listening to some of the comments by the member from the third party, I too would like to offer some support for those comments.

There are numerous other fields where we should be using presumptions that extend coverage to many other people in this province. The member brought up numerous other activities, whether they're in farming, whether with oil and gas workers working with chemicals, whether they're with construction workers working with paints and paint thinners, countless examples of things that other jurisdictions have recognized where their work has contributed to illnesses in certain cases. Often these are common-sense linkages that other jurisdictions have taken for granted.

Another point that the hon. member made is perfectly correct. If most people who become sick and find themselves in a situation where they're given a denial by the Workers' Compensation Board, or the employers' noncompensation board, whatever you want to call it, they have no other means of getting to be heard unless they hire a high-priced lawyer. We all know that if rejected by the board, many people, because the price of hiring a lawyer is exorbitant not only here but elsewhere, effectively don't get justice with the WCB. I think we've made a pretty strong case here. In fact, a case has been made for quite some time in this province that the WCB is in shambles. It doesn't protect workers to the extent necessary to give them the rights and the compensation they need to carry out their daily lives, and that system should be looked at.

I'd like to just thank her for those comments and add that I think we need to get back to some of those principles. If we're going to have a Workers' Compensation Board, let's do it for the protection of workers, not the protection of employers.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We'll move on from there.

4:00

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also would like to speak in support of Bill 20. I'd like to applaud the minister for including the volunteer firefighters under workers' compensation for cancer-

related illnesses. I remember when the Member for Calgary-North Hill brought forward the bill to cover firefighters for cancer. I think this should be extended, as we heard other members speak, to farm workers who work with chemicals like pesticides and herbicides and construction workers, too, who work with paints and you name it. It comes to mind that people working with asbestos had lung cancer as well. I think this coverage should be extended to more workers who may suffer from work-related illnesses and cancers.

Once again, I wholeheartedly support this bill because it will encourage more volunteers to come forward to be firefighters and maybe be in other fields, too. I think it's a step in the right direction, but it's not going all the way. We should be extending this coverage to more and more workers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee now rise and report Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill, Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 39(1)(b) so that the House may now consider Government Motion 17, which will allow for the appointment of a special committee of the Legislature to appoint a search committee for the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

- Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Zwozdesky: Be it resolved that a Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Mitzel, chair; Mr. Lund, deputy chair; Ms

Blakeman; Mr. Hinman; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Marz; Ms Nottle; Mr. Quest; and Mr. Rogers, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Information and Privacy Commissioner and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Government House Leader wishes to thank you for recognizing him making a motion on behalf of the other Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to move Government Motion 17.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

It's been a very good debate, and I want to thank all members that have spoken to the bill for their comments. I believe this bill is a good piece of governance that is needed to ensure that both government and industry continue to operate efficiently and effectively. When it comes to energy development and energy utilities, it is important that we keep our rules up to date. Our economy and communities throughout our province depend on it. All Albertans depend on the agencies of government to have the authority to carry out their mandates.

Bill 16 is a responsible bill that updates a broad range of rules related to energy development and the operation of our utility sectors. In particular, this bill will ensure that the Energy Resources Conservation Board has the authority to regulate underground coal gasification. Currently legislation only refers to mining as a means to extract coal from the ground. Other provi-

sions will remove duplication in approvals for the use of large amounts of energy for industrial operations and will enable the ERCB to make regulations and to approve amendments to coal permits in line with other industries that the ERCB regulates.

The functioning of a fair and efficient electricity market will also be strengthened and the quality of service standards will be harmonized between electric utilities and gas utilities to ensure that customers benefit from quality services across utilities.

In closing, these are necessary legislative amendments that provide our regulatory agencies the necessary authority to continue to operate efficiently and effectively. I thank all members of the House for their comments, and I look forward to the final passage of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and discuss further Bill 16, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011. As the hon. member indicates, this bill is working with a variety of different acts and tries to pull together various themes, various things to deal with the production of in situ coal, deal with industrial development permits as well as looking at our Electric Utilities Act and the Alberta Utilities Commission and how it operates in our daily lives.

4:10

With all acts that act as omnibus acts, that tend to pull things together, it leaves a person on the opposition benches looking at it with, as I said earlier, a healthy dose of skepticism and concern. I will address those, and hopefully these will come to naught, and everything that the government says is going to come as a result of these bills will be for the betterment of the Alberta people in the long run. I am hopeful that that will be the case. Nevertheless, as it is my sworn duty as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I am under not only an obligation but a sworn duty to make some of those concerns noted and have the government prove its case over time. Hopefully, people will look back at this speech and say: well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was a little off that day, and the government was right once again. Nevertheless, it's better to be often wrong and with an opinion and to have concerns noted than to have not noted them at all.

So here we go on some of these things. If I look at this overarching goal and direction of the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, it's tying on a whole bunch of new brave initiatives going down here in Alberta. Of course, we have an abundance of coal that is still part of our legacy and, actually, probably will be used at some point in time. This is a new regulatory framework that is trying to bring into our regulatory systems the use of in situ coal schemes that can produce synthetic coal, gas, and liquids through in situ coal gasification and liquefaction. That sounds, you know, like a reasonable thing, possibly, for the government to be involved in.

There is a difficult thing when we start throwing around terms like clean coal. That stuff is often an oxymoron. We know full well at this time that much of the stuff that we do to clean and scrub coal and to put it to use in whatever fashion is simply not measuring up to what other things are doing out there. It's much cleaner and efficient to burn natural gas. It's much better to of course try and use wind and solar and other things that are available, no doubt, sir, with a higher cost. That is, too, what we always look at: a balanced approach as to what our citizens can afford and what is in fact the right thing to do for the long run. I have no illusions that these are often difficult things to balance. I'd just bring up here that at this time we're putting forward a scheme that

looks like it's going to send Alberta down a path of coal development when there are recommendations out there from other jurisdictions saying – I heard an organization say that there should be no more coal-fired electricity plants. You hear that throughout the world, that maybe that day has come and gone.

Now, with technology available like carbon cap and storage does that make things different? I don't know. In Alberta that's another thing we've ventured down the path of, carbon capture and storage. Am I hopeful that this technology will work? Of course I am. God willing and the crick don't rise, this is going to be a very successful endeavour that is not only going to bury emissions for all time in a safe and effective manner but will also allow us to get more of our petroleum resources to the surface. Nevertheless, again, it's not a proven technology. Nothing says that this is going to work one hundred per cent. We're investing an awful lot of money, a lot of our future capital and earnings, into these projects that may not work out.

Other organizations, other pundits, other people with some expertise are saying that this money is better invested in other ways, into, as mentioned earlier, wind and solar and other things that may be in the long run more beneficial to Alberta citizens, maybe to citizens of the world but also even to us in diversifying our economy.

Am I an expert in this? By no means. I just bring that up as an observer of situations that we're doing here in Alberta as well as sort of reviewing some of the commentary that's out there that's of a more global nature, that we have to balance here in Alberta. I'm not sure we're getting that balance correct. This act tends to be carrying us further along on some of these things that I worry about. Hey, like I said earlier, maybe I shouldn't be worrying, but that's what I'm doing.

We've had many changes to our electricity system, the way we've delivered electricity in this province. Roughly 15 years ago we went away from a regulated system, that tended to smooth over some of the imbalances that can be out there when market forces are at play and the consumer is left to deal with the vagaries of the marketplace.

We've moved on from that, and the Alberta citizen has, in my view and I think almost anyone's view, paid higher electricity prices as a result of that change. We even saw this government tacitly agree with that by subsidizing electricity prices for a long time in this province. In fact, it was – I don't know – done for six or seven years as a way to say: "Okay. The citizens are now paying too much for electricity. Let's give them a subsidy." That was done, and I look at that as a tacit admission of things not working out when they privatized the market.

Now we're at a time where you're trying to make that system better, where we've gone now 15 years, and in many ways I look at that and say: yeah, you can't go back to 1995 when you're in 2010. Nevertheless, this is looking at how to make the system that is existing better.

Am I hopeful that this opens up a possibility for us to allow for better oversight of a marketplace that people are skeptical about, where people have been hooked into long-term contracts that have not been in their best interests and have been used to pressure sales by men and women who have strong-armed consumers into signing deals obviously not in their best interests and of that nature? Hopefully, this bill will do that. At the same time, you know, we can't be certain. I just put those concerns on the record.

It has just been brought to our attention that some of this stuff is coming at a time when changes under Bill 16 to unify the gas and electric service standards are seen as helping to move along the harmonization of the regulated option and the default gas supply regulation. This was being discussed at the Alberta Utilities

Commission on regulation and harmonization. We note that this report hasn't been released yet. The question that could be raised is: why are we unifying standards, seemingly, in this Bill 16 when we haven't seen the report on unifying regulation from the Utilities Commission? That's another concern that has been flagged to us at this time.

4:20

You can see that a lot of my concerns are of a larger nature than just this bill. It's a concern over whether we in this province should be continuing down what looks like a path of utilizing more, not less, coal in our daily needs. It also looks at whether sinking more time, energy, and resources into changing statutes to incorporate carbon capture and storage is wise given the concerns out there. Hey, I hope it works – and a lot of people do – but we've got to be cognizant of the fact that we can't put all our eggs in one basket and that we should look at many ways to diversify the reduction of our fossil fuel emissions, not only through carbon capture and storage. End users of all kinds have got to do their part, and that includes yours truly sitting right here at this desk.

Those are my comments. I appreciate that although I can't point to one specific thing – it's more of a general feeling that there are some nagging issues out there for me – as a member of this Legislature I'm not confident enough yet in this government's direction to give a full sign-off to this bill. Nevertheless, on the God willing and the crick don't rise front, I hope it does work out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to this bill in third reading. It was unfortunate and due to my 10-minute late arrival last night that I was unable to participate in the bill's discussion at committee. I believe we had a combined amount of about 20 minutes dedicated to it in committee, and we had some amendments we hoped to have considered. However, I guess you've got to take responsibility for showing up 10 minutes late when things get moving really fast around here.

We have some very significant concerns with this bill. The first piece of it, I guess, is that this is something that flows from the regulatory enhancement task force report. This is, you know, a small piece of that, but it is part of it. That task force report raises a number of red flags for members of our caucus in terms of the intentions of this government to proceed in anything bordering on a prudent basis to ensure that future oil and gas development in this province is done in a way that preserves and protects the public interest not only now but in the future.

My concern is that the talk of streamlining is actually talk about enabling and limiting the opportunities for the public to have oversight and also limiting the opportunities for those outside of industry, stakeholders shall I say, to ensure the best outcome for community development and environmental integrity now and in the future.

There's a whole raft of reasons why we would suggest that that's not the way to go, but of course one of them is this whole notion of there being a single regulator that's somehow tasked with the obligation to juggle multiple mandates. The problem becomes that when a regulator is tasked with the obligation to juggle multiple mandates, it starts horse-trading with itself, and it does so without us really understanding how it's doing that. It also does so not necessarily with a clear and consistent set of principles on how it horse-trades with itself.

You end up in a situation where, for instance – I believe it was a couple of days ago – the Minister of Energy was asked about, you

know, what we could expect would happen and what assurances we could expect would be in place through the ERCB before the pipeline that breached adjacent to the Lubicon community was allowed to restart. How could we be sure that it would be done safely, and how could we be sure that there was adequate integrity in that pipeline as a whole given its history of breaching, given the history of the company generally speaking, and how could we be sure that the community and the environment were protected before we started putting oil down there again?

The minister responded: well, you know, we're going to do everything we can, but you've got to remember that the ERCB is also responsible for ensuring that such and such a community up north gets adequate energy supply. That's a legitimate consideration. I'm not in any way suggesting that that's not a legitimate consideration, but right there what you see is the example of the regulator horse-trading with itself.

I would suggest to you that what needs to happen is that you need to have a mandate, and the mandate is, in one case, thou shalt protect the environment and ensure that it is not compromised. Then you will have another organization with a mandate to build the economy, you know, to hand out money to the oil companies, to make sure that we've created jobs, to get energy to particular communities, whatever the mandate is. [interjection] What's that? Right. Was it Norman Wells? Right. That's fine, but if you've got one regulator horse-trading with itself, then what happens is that that fundamental mandate – don't do harm to the environment – gets compromised. What ought to happen is – you know what? – one regulator saying: "Our job is to protect the environment, and we can't turn the tap on until we know it's safe. Sorry."

Then what has to happen is that other strategies have to be developed around that mandate to get to the other issue of getting oil and gas up to Norman Wells. That's the way it should be because that's the way you protect the interests of both groups. If you horse-trade between yourselves there, then you're going to end up doing a bad job for both groups. That's the concern that I'm worried about, when you start mixing the mandates of different regulatory bodies, as is being proposed here.

In this particular bill one of the things that the bill purports to do is take away from the ERCB and move over to Environment the process of assessing – what is it called? – industrial development permits, which is something that the ERCB used to do. We're told: well, the ERCB doesn't need to do that anymore. It used to be that the ERCB would do that to make sure that particular industrial developments would not in a haphazard or irrational way suck all the energy into this one industrial development to the exclusion of the community, the municipality, or whatever and that the energy was properly distributed. That's what the ERCB used to do when it took a look at these IDPs.

Now we're told we don't need that because the market will fix it. Well, yeah, the market will fix it, and the market may fix it in that consumers adjacent to this new IDP will find themselves paying for water or some other source of energy at three or four times the rate that it used to be. Yeah, the market has fixed it, but it hasn't fixed it in the best interests of Alberta consumers, and that's why the ERCB was looking at it in the first place. So I'm concerned. I'm concerned that that's the way we want to go. I mean, I can think of a few industrial projects that might pop up adjacent to a water supply, for instance, which a municipality also relies upon.

Now, we're not looking at whether that industrial permit is appropriate anymore in terms of whether it meets the overarching public interest. We're just going to let the market deal with the outcome of that industrial development, and, you know, the community will just pay what they've got to pay. Well, I don't know

that that's wise. I don't think that that's a good idea. I'm concerned about that because, again, what we're then going to do is we're going to take that process and it's apparently going to be partially replicated by the Ministry of Environment. I know that the Ministry of Environment does also assess these industrial developments, but currently they do it under a different mandate with different criteria, and it's not clear that the criteria are absolutely going to mesh when the Ministry of Environment is going through its process.

It really sounds to me like we're not taking a focused, rational, inclusive approach to ensure that best interests are met. We are blindly slashing and burning what we see as red tape, and we're not really thinking about what this means for the often conflicting interests in a particular community in the province between a variety of different groups. There's nothing wrong with there being conflicting interests. We don't have, you know, all the land in the world. We are, ultimately, going to have conflicting interests in terms of how we use and develop our environmental and natural resources, but we need to have a way of dealing with that that adheres to certain principles, certain priorities. By going through this process, we're just meshing it all together, and I don't believe that we have a refined, rational, well-thought-out system of prioritizing on behalf of Albertans.

4:30

That's the second concern, and that would have been one of the amendments that we would have made. We would have eliminated the provision that would have moved that function over to Environment from the ERCB without first ensuring that there was an entire making up for what we were losing by taking it away from the ERCB, which it's clear is not currently being contemplated in this act.

The second major thing that this act does, of course, is it enables in situ coal gasification processes. Again, that's fine. This is an area that has some potential. I think some people in industry and government are perhaps overstating its potential at this point. I think there are still a lot of legitimate questions to be asked about the future and the efficacy of this particular technology in the context of Alberta's future energy development. But it's certainly a promising area that, at least from a transitional point of view, may well be very valuable to us.

At this point what we have is two experimental in situ sites: Swan Hills, which received approval for an experimental scheme in June of 2008; and then Laurus Energy, which received its approval in March of this year, so really nothing has gone on there. We don't really know at this point what's happened in the last two years or three years nor do we know exactly where it's going. I'm a little curious as to how we did get those experimental sites approved if we're only now passing the legislation to enable it. Perhaps someone can let me know about that in the future.

At the end of the day my concern, again, with respect to this incredible potential development here is twofold. The first is that I don't see that we currently have an environmental assurance scheme that is adequately regulated or adequately resourced to oversee this grand development that is anticipated by this piece of legislation in a way that ensures the safety and the long-term sustainability of the industry and/or the community adjacent to the industry in this province. There are a number of legitimate issues and questions that arise with the in situ coal gas process, answers for which we do not have. We don't know yet exactly how this will implicate groundwater contamination issues. We haven't mapped adequately the areas that could be impacted through this process. We don't know yet what the process will do to ground subsidence in terms of what that will do, ultimately, to surface

water flows and aquifers as well as ground infrastructure like roads and pipelines.

We don't know that yet, and I don't trust this government based on its record up to now to convince me that they are prepared to do the work that is necessary to keep us safe as we plow forward on this. We've got the enabling legislation to plow forward on this, but we haven't put an extra cent into the Ministry of Environment to make sure that we do it right. Quite the opposite. We've cut from the Ministry of Environment. So it's very clear that our intention is to plow forward on this without providing the adequate resources to ensure that we do it safely and responsibly in the best interests of all Albertans.

There are, ultimately, other land-use impacts that could arise from this process, which again we're not exactly sure what those will end up being. Then the whole question of air emissions. Yes, the greenhouse gas emissions from this process are about 25 per cent less than current coal production processes, and that's great. Twenty-five per cent is nothing to sneeze at. Down the line, 10, 15, 20 years from now – I can't remember what the Minister of Energy said one day in a moment of frankness – when we could actually expect to see something happening with carbon capture and storage, were it to actually happen, then carbon capture and storage has the capacity to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions more significantly.

Again, based on what we've seen this government do, based on the fact that we have copious numbers of tailings ponds around Fort McMurray where we have absolutely not one solution designed yet to deal with them, given that we develop first and then ask questions about the consequences later, my concern is that this piece of legislation is going to enable that rampant development without any of the answers to these important questions having been provided.

Those are the primary concerns. I guess the final concern that I will raise with respect to this bill relates to the section of amendments that address the Market Surveillance Administrator and provide to the Market Surveillance Administrator the opportunity to make complaints where they believe that the ISO, I believe, has adopted any type of rule that would impede the functioning of a proper market. I will say that this is a very complex area, and I'm the first to admit that I could easily spend six months learning about how all these organizations interact with each other. So I'm not going to get into an extensive discussion about this.

One thing that was brought to our attention, though, was that in that whole piece of legislation there ought to be some provision made – again, thinking to the future, not necessarily making it happen right now – for ensuring that we have an exception to that market rule where we might be looking at the whole issue of feed-in tariffs because, heaven forbid, even though this government right now is full speed ahead on a carbon only energy policy in the future, there may well be other people that will come forward that see the value in more aggressively pursuing a renewable energy industry in this province.

Feed-in tariffs are a component to that. Now, they're not a simple answer. There are cost implications to the consumer that arise with feed-in tariffs, and I'll be the first one to say that that needs to be fully examined and ways to ameliorate that need to be established before you go forward. But it is something that is a critical key to assisting in the development of the renewable energy industry, and the provision there does not allow for that to come forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone for comments and questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to echo some of the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo as well as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. We have all noted that Bill 16 is a very complex piece of legislation that attempts to connect or tie together a variety of both energy and, on the other side of that coin, environmental concerns.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo pointed out this concern, and I just want to provide a little bit more background to it. Changes under Bill 16 to unify the gas and electric service standards are seen as helping to move along the harmonization of regulated rate option electric regulation and default gas supply gas regulation. The written decision of the Alberta Utilities Commission on regulation harmonization has not been released as of yet.

Now, I give the government credit, Mr. Speaker, for having hearings that basically began on July 6 of last year and ran through to November 8, and I am assuming that these intervention hearings were well publicized and anyone who wished to intervene had the opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, this all happened six months ago and the findings of the commission have yet to be realized. What we're doing today is that the government is asking us to approve the game without the rules. This happens, unfortunately, far too frequently. You know, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said: trust us. That's frequently very hard to do.

I do believe, Mr. Speaker, in the intervenor process. I've been an intervenor when it came to natural gas increases. I was the last intervenor with regard to the Compton hearing regarding the sour gas wells that they wanted to drill faster within a kilometre of the southeast hospital. In that case the Compton hearing went on for almost two years. So trying to decide what is the appropriate amount of time can be a challenge.

4:40

The government, to its credit, allowed the process to go on. A couple of the major intervenors were the Calgary health board as well as the city of Calgary, and they put forward some very convincing arguments. I intervened on behalf of the Friends of Medicare. I was the Alberta chair at that time, and because the hearing overlapped with my election as the representative for Calgary-Varsity, I continued to pursue that hearing. The quote that sticks out in my mind from that particular hearing was that any chance of a sour gas release or explosion was the square root of zero, and that was said by one of the Compton executives. That kind of bravado makes you wonder about the interventions.

I also had the opportunity to participate in a Turner Valley environmental assessment that had to do with the area in which Turner Valley in conjunction with Black Diamond were creating a large retaining pool for their water. The complications that arose in Turner Valley – and it was quite a costly concern – were that there were not sufficient historical records as to where old gas and oil wells were located. It turned out that the engineering plans that were drawn up originally didn't take into account that there were actual wells in the midst of the water reservoir. So this caused great concern to a number of Turner Valley and Black Diamond residents. It was resolved. Again, to the Environment ministry's credit, expert witnesses were called, and the process provided constituents of Turner Valley and Black Diamond a degree of confidence because they had heard from a series of specialists.

Mr. Speaker, I give the government credit for having intervention processes and allowing people to participate in the discussion, whether they're amateurs like myself as a concerned citizen when it comes to oil and gas concerns or the experts.

Now, I share the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's concerns about moving the oversight from the ERCB to Environ-

ment. I commented on one strong example of environmental oversight, and that was the hearings at Turner Valley. But I'm also very aware that the Environment ministry, because it is so short-staffed and underfunded, relies on industry to report problems. The example of the ducks landing in the tailings ponds: if that had not been, basically, witnessed by an independent citizen and then reported to Environment, it would have gone unnoticed.

This business of relying on industry to do the reporting, which frequently as in the case of the latest oil spill happened days after, when several thousand barrels of oil had leaked from the broken weld in the pipeline, and the concerns, as the hon. member indicated, with the folks from Norman Wells, who depend on that to create local energy, and the balance between the Lubicon nation, whose backyard was thoroughly interfered with by this major oil spill, is of great concern.

Now, another concern that has to be taken into account with Bill 16 is the balance between economic nonrenewable progress and environmental protection. I am hoping that this omnibus bill will start to equalize the standards. For example, the standard for reclamation for coal with the open pit mining, which I've witnessed in the area of Edson, is considerably stricter both in timelines and expectations than is the reclamation for the mining of bitumen north of Fort McMurray.

In the case of Edson they were very careful. They were required to set aside the topsoil and, basically, to the greatest extent possible recreate the type of environment that they disturbed. I would suggest that to a degree they even bonused it because when they put the soil back in those trenches with the open pit mining, there was sufficient soil to plant shrubs and trees that were common to the area, that were most likely to succeed and develop to maturity. Then because of the depth of the mining, when these areas were filled, they became little lakes that were sufficiently deep for trout to overwinter. So that was an example of reclamation, environmental expectations being realized.

Of course, north of Fort McMurray given the muskeg, given the peat bogs it's an entirely different circumstance. You can't restore the area to its original circumstance, but you can reclaim it, and the speed at which that reclamation occurs and certificates are awarded for that reclamation seems to be an awfully long process.

To the government's credit we wouldn't have the oil sands if Peter Lougheed back in the day, in the early '70s, hadn't provided incentives to companies to develop the oil sands. The government recognized just recently that they needed to provide similar incentives to nonrenewable energy sources. For a number of years the government had capped wind power, and they realized that that was kind of a regressive move, but the government has not provided anywhere near the types of incentives for clean energy, for renewable energy that it has provided for oil and gas and bitumen exploration.

So the government has a long way to go, and because of the complexity of Bill 16 I'm not sure that the incentives for energy development are inherent in this particular bill. I wouldn't want to use the expression "doubting Thomas" because it would potentially be associated with another member of this Assembly, but I will express some doubt as to the complexity of Bill 16 and whether it will achieve the balance that the Alberta Liberals have asked for in terms of sustainability and environmental protection as we move forward economically.

I want to just re-emphasize the point that I would like to see the same level of investment in nonrenewables as we move forward so that we can meet the world's demand when oil and gas, whether it's produced by coal or other means, is no longer as attractive or potentially as necessary as innovation improves our energy provisions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak in third to Bill 16.

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

4:50

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak on Bill 16 in third reading. I think this is a big bill, too, and it tries to amend a few acts. From the outset I was in support of this, but then when I read the whole bill, it gets complex as this act tries to create a framework for the Energy Resources Conservation Board to regulate in situ coal schemes in a similar fashion to conventional petroleum product deposits. It's trying to streamline the regulatory process for conventional coal deposit development. Further, it goes on to eliminate duplication in processes for investigative development that consumes large quantities of energy resources. I think that's a good thing, you know, if we're going to cut red tape and speed up the process.

That raises further questions about bringing on a boom and creating boom-and-bust cycles. How are we going to control the development? That remains to be seen. It will expand the oversight of gas distribution and default gas providers to both ensure systems safety and ensure consumer protection by harmonizing regulations with electric utilities.

It goes on to expand the oversight of the independent Alberta Electric System Operator by a Market Surveillance Administrator to ensure the safe operation of the Alberta electricity market. It's also going to reclassify downstream facilities that produce oil sands products as oil sands facilities to encourage investment in downstream activities beyond upgrading. So it will also bring some issues with the tax regime.

The bill is going to impact the amendments to the Coal Conservation Act and will create a regulatory framework for in situ coal schemes that will close a theoretical loophole that currently allows the operation of a scheme outside of the majority of the conventional petroleum regulatory framework. It will also create a regulatory framework for in situ coal schemes and may encourage investment, research, experimentation, and development that may evolve into more environmentally friendly alternatives to conventional coal used over time and, most likely, the generation of electricity.

It will also change the definition of coal in defining coal seams and may turn some marginal coal deposits from mineral resources to pore spaces, potentially changing the ownership if the mineral rights are owned by private interests and allowing the use of very low-quality coal formations as carbon capture and storage reservoirs. It is very important to raise this in the House, and I'm seeking clarification on this as well.

Eliminating the industrial development permits may allow irrational self-interest to overrule collective interests at times. For example, preventing the burning of ethane as a fuel versus reserving it for use as petrochemical feedstock may be more difficult under environmental regulations. Reclassifying downstream oil and processing facilities at oil sands processing facilities may change oil sands projects and create tax and royalty regime advantages, which may encourage more value-added industry to be placed in Alberta rather than in other jurisdictions.

This act, as I say, is a mixed bag, one that with amendments we could probably have made better. With the loss of industrial development permits, we'll lose an avenue for the rejection of large industrial facilities, that consume Alberta energy resources, by the Lieutenant Governor in Council outright under general public interest. That doesn't exist as broadly under environmental statute. This would be more significant if permits were ever rejected. While an Alberta Liberal government might wish to implement similar provisions that are being removed by this act, it is no significant loss to the public good under the current government.

The expansion of oversight by the independent Alberta Electric System Operator of gas distributors, gas default supply providers, and

electric utilities will help to improve the function of the utility system as designed while increasing consumer protection. We might object to the fundamental design of the system, most notably permitted profit margins and distribution of capital costs among market participants. So it is marginal improvements to the existing system. A vote for marginal improvements is not a vote for endorsing the current system. This bill is trying to do much more, and I think it's complex. It just raises more questions about the tax regime, about the boom-and-bust cycle. I don't know. I'm just confused about this bill.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, do you wish to close debate?

Mrs. McQueen: No.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 19

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you quite adeptly mentioned, I rise today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to move third reading of Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just briefly review the list of all the acts that are affected by this particular bill. It affects the Emergency Management Act, the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, the Business Corporations Act, the Cooperatives Act, the Land Titles Act, and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. I think all of members of this Assembly know that miscellaneous statutes typically reflect provisions that are straightforward in a noncontentious nature.

I would encourage all members to support the passage of this act.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Bill 20

Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 20, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2011.

I'd ask all members to support the passage of this bill.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Seeing that there is unanimous support in this House for Bill 20, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties Amendment Act, 2011

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on behalf of the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties Amendment Act, 2011.

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Because of the nature of the private bills, that we are basically acting upon the requests of external organizations to let their will be done, so to speak, I would call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr.1 read a third time]

5:00

Bill Pr. 2

Galt Scholarship Fund Transfer Act

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, Galt Scholarship Fund Transfer Act.

As just a bit of the history the Galt family had left money in 1913 to the old Galt hospital, and over time this money has been taken over and managed by the Galt nursing alumnae. This money now equals \$144,000, and they have decided that it is time to transfer these funds to the University of Lethbridge for nursing scholarships. It's a wonderful gesture, and the Galt School of Nursing Alumnae Society are to be thanked and congratulated for keeping the trust of the Galt family. The Galt family, I'm sure, would be very satisfied.

I would ask that the question be called.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 7

Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2011

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 7, Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2011.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Chase: Very, very briefly, and then I'll call the question. When my father retired from the services, he was a counsellor at Roper Hull Home, and I am very aware from my work with Children and Youth Services of the valued work that the Hull family services provides.

I'm very pleased with this piece of legislation and, therefore, call the question.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 7 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the business scheduled for today has concluded, I would move that we now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:02 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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