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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 7

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 16, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany, the ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Dr. Georg Witschel, and Mr. Michael Bernd Reuscher, honorary consul of Germany for northern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Germany continues to be an important export market for Alberta, and we share a strong and productive partnership in education and culture. In fact, 2012 marks the 10th anniversary of the Alberta-Germany office in Munich and our province's twinning agreement with the German state of Saxony.

Ambassador Witschel is in Edmonton for the bestowal ceremony of the Cross of the Order of Merit to Mr. Reuscher. I had the pleasure of sitting down with the ambassador yesterday to discuss the ongoing activities between our province and Germany. Ambassador Witschel and Mr. Reuscher are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I see that they're standing. I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Water.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make an introduction on behalf of my good friend and colleague the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. The member is, unfortunately, unable to be here this afternoon. However, he is pleased that His Worship Mayor Steve Grajczyk and Chief Administrative Officer Dwight Stanford from the town of Strathmore are able to join us here today. The gentlemen have risen, so let's give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful guest and colleague in the service of Albertans, Catherine Ripley, Edmonton public school trustee for ward H, which serves my constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. She works tirelessly for the children in her ward and for education policy. I've had the great pleasure of participating with her in a southwest Edmonton community meeting that she organized last fall on the Education Act with her fellow trustee, Michael Janz. It was a great opportunity to come out and be engaged with community members and parents on

issues of education. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and thank you from this House.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special guest, a colleague, and a good friend of mine, the mayor of the city of Wetaskiwin, Mr. Bill Elliot, who is in your gallery. Before being elected to his first term as mayor in 2010, Mayor Elliot served as an alderman for the city of Wetaskiwin for 21 years. Along with his long history of public service he also dedicated a large part of his life to Alberta's education system. He was a teacher and principal for 32 years before retiring in 2004. His contributions to the city of Wetaskiwin should be applauded, and that's why I would ask the mayor to rise so that he can receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly 25 very dedicated teachers who are visiting Edmonton today on a teachers' convention. This is the North East Teachers' Convention that they are attending, and they're here from a variety of school boards from the northeastern part of our province. The school boards are Northland, Fort Vermilion, Lakeland Catholic, greater St. Paul, Aspen View, and Northern Lights. I would ask these teachers to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight guests here in recognition of the February 10, 2012, grand opening of Extendicare Eaux Claires, a 180-bed long-term care facility in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. These individuals represent the management and staff of Extendicare Eaux Claires, who provide dedicated support and care to all their residents. I'd ask them to please rise as I mention their names. They include Margaret Burnes, director of care; Renée Ferweda, community manager; Eduardo Sedoripa, community manager; Amanda Barba, in-service co-ordinator; Jennifer Bourret, rehabilitation supervisor; Tracy Larson, general services supervisor; Marilyn Wood, recruiter; Colleen Lycar, regional director. I would now ask these hard-working Extendicare representatives to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent and staff member of mine, Ms Arlene Charles. Arlene has an extensive background in land administration, having worked with Enbridge, TransCanada PipeLines, Shell, and Indian and northern affairs. She also has strong ties to the community through her volunteer work with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. Most recently she joined the Edmonton-Calder team as a constituency assistant, where she has truly excelled and is becoming a casework guru. If I may make a slight example, we got a phone call in our office about a young couple who found themselves without a home at about 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon, and I think it was

about 9 o'clock last night before Arlene got the matter resolved to everyone's satisfaction. I'd ask Arlene to now rise and receive the traditional and well-deserved greeting of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of workers from the Royal Alexandra hospital and other health care facilities in our city who are here to observe, potentially, the debate and some questions around the walkout that's taking place now across the province and the very insulting offer that has been made to them. They are Al Pelletier, Sherry Holtet, Jana Kulusic, Dewaight Todd, Dina Moreira, Luis Cardenas, Dan Milo, Sami Mansi, Deana Adams, and Fernanda Rebelo. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three Congolese Albertans who are concerned about an illicit Canadian mining operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Their second letter, which I will later table, begins: "We, the members of the Congolese Diaspora in Alberta accuse the Canadian mining businesses for illicit operation in Congo."

The Speaker: This is introductions, hon. member. This is introductions. Please introduce.

Mr. Chase: Yes. The members that I was attempting to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly . . .

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry. Proceed, please, with introductions.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Would Samy Mukadi, Albert Mbuyi, and Rene Tahibula please stand and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

Merci, M. le Président.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Extendicare Eaux Claires Long-term Care Complex

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my honour and privilege to join my colleagues the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health and Wellness to help celebrate the grand opening on February 10, 2012, of the Extendicare Eaux Claires, a world-class long-term care complex in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. The newly constructed three-storey complex provides an additional 180 beds to Edmonton's long-term care system.

Extendicare Eaux Claires is designed with distinct areas consisting of 30 rooms within a neighbourhood, a homelike arrangement that assists in building a great sense of community for all the residents. Mr. Speaker, each resident has their own personalized large living space complete with a private bathroom. The homelike atmosphere is in large part due to the tireless, dedicated management and staff, who provide resident-focused care and support. The first residents were admitted into the new home in early November of last year.

Also, residents have access to the on-site services, which include registered dietitians; occupational, physical, and recreation therapists; rehab aides; maintenance staff; and social workers.

I was privileged to meet many of the residents and their families during the opening of the Extendicare Eaux Claires home, and time after time they emphasized personal satisfaction and pleasure with the new complex, with the high standards, great services, and the level of dedicated care by all the staff members.

Mr. Speaker, our government's commitment to long-term care in partnership with the Canadian-owned and -operated Extendicare provides quality, patient-focused continuing care options for Albertans.

Congratulations and best wishes to Extendicare Eaux Claires.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Labour Negotiations with Hospital Support Staff

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several hours hundreds of people employed by Alberta Health Services in communities around the province have been taking job action. These workers are in some of the lowest-paid jobs with the most unpleasant and onerous duties in the health system yet jobs that are critical to ensuring that people in hospitals are receiving excellent care.

The people taking action today work in meal preparation, as porters, cleaners, therapy assistants, and pharmacy assistants. These workers are paid on average less than half the Alberta average earnings, in the range of \$500 a week. It is very tough to make ends meet on that sort of salary. This month the average electricity bill they will face in their homes will be nearly \$200.

Many of the people taking this action are women for whom these jobs are vital, who have children dependent on them. Food, housing, and other basic needs entirely eat up such small salaries, with nothing left over. These people are at the heart of the health services delivered yet have been treated like third-class citizens.

These workers were insulted over the last few weeks. Alberta Health Services ignored a mediator's recommendation, that the workers had already rejected, and made an offer to them that was even lower, a few cents an hour for most. This is bargaining in bad faith, seeking to bully workers who make far less than what is needed for their families.

Contrast the treatment of these support workers with the ever-multiplying managers inside government for whom the average compensation is over \$140,000 a year; or Alberta judges, who just received \$30,000 more per year retroactive to 2009; or cabinet ministers, who a couple of years ago voted themselves a \$42,000-a-year increase and a \$54,000 increase for the Premier.

There is no reason for these caring people to be pushed to this action except that the unfair labour laws in the province mean they cannot get a fair settlement and that they are pushed to a point of desperation. The government that had a commitment to human rights and fairness would immediately commit to real bargaining with these workers and move . . .

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

Seniors' Housing in Bonnyville

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over my past four years as MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake my number one priority for our community has been to increase accessibility to seniors' housing, particularly in the town of Bonnyville.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the first step in making this a reality for seniors in need in my community. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs announced \$10 million in funding towards the redevelopment of both the Villa Ouimet apartment complex and the Bonny Lodge. This funding supports phase 1 of a two-phase project which renews both the seniors' self-contained apartments and lodge spaces. This phase includes plans to remove three four-unit complexes, to build 30 new units, and a 22-unit link to the main lodge as well as modernization of the kitchen and dining area. When completed, the project will provide 128 units.

This project will be carried out in partnership with the Lakeland Lodge and Housing Foundation, which manages the Villa Ouimet seniors' apartments and Bonnylodge on behalf of the government. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the foundation and, in particular, the chair of the board and Bonnyville town councillor, Ray Prevost.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday was an incredible day for my community, and it was a milestone for Bonnyville seniors. I am so proud to be part of a government that takes action to continue to support and improve the quality of life for seniors across this great province. Yesterday was one step in many for this government.

Thank you.

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, we are blessed to live in this province. Our economy has made a strong recovery, and there are many opportunities for Albertans. People are coming here for a new life where they can build their own success stories in Alberta.

But there is a group of people right here in our province who are building their own success stories every day, people whose success might not be readily recognized. They are the homeless people, and they are coming back into our communities and building better, healthier, more productive lives. Their common denominator is Alberta's plan to end homelessness by 2019. Today if you met some of these people whose lives have been transformed, it would be hard to believe that they once were homeless people.

Let me briefly tell you a story of a formally homeless man who lives in Edmonton. Severe drug addiction drove him to the street, where he lived for about a year. He lost his wife and child. His situation was dire. Eventually he entered a detox facility, and he received help through a housing first program. People in the program helped him to find a place to live and gave him the supports that he needed to stabilize his life. With their help and support his life really started to turn around. He is a very different person today, Mr. Speaker. He lives with his wife and child and a second child. He's also a student at the local university, studying psychology. His dream is to become a drug and alcohol counsellor to help people whose lives may take the same path his did. He is succeeding. He is giving back to his community.

His and many other lives have been touched and transformed by the compassionate values instilled in Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness by 2019. Since the inception of the plan more than 4,800 people like the man I just spoke about have been given the chance and the support to reclaim lives of dignity and independence.

When homeless people succeed, we all succeed, Mr. Speaker. It costs almost three times more to leave a person living on the street than to give a chronically homeless person a place to live. Ending homelessness just makes sense morally, fiscally, and socially.

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

Edmonton Clinic Health Academy

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While other jurisdictions plan for the future, Alberta is already there. Last month I had the honour of participating in the official opening of the Edmonton Clinic Health Academy on the University of Alberta campus. I'm not exaggerating when I say that this clinic will change how we deliver outpatient care and improve health sciences education and research in the province.

Our Premier has spoken clearly about how Alberta needs to be more patient centred, and the Edmonton Clinic Health Academy will help us do that. It will create and support interdisciplinary research and team-based education that will enable the innovative health care Albertans and Canadians want and deserve. For example, engineers will work with people from rehabilitation medicine and computer science to develop new technologies to help people with prosthetic limbs. Dietitians, occupational therapists, dentists, and pediatricians will practise team care in simulated doctors' offices, a far cry from the days when different disciplines learned and trained in separate silos.

At the Edmonton Clinic Health Academy people are working and learning together and developing solutions that work with the broader community to bring innovations to the people who need them the most. I look forward to the new discoveries and solutions to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Labour Negotiations with Hospital Support Staff

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning support staff at hospitals all around the province had been pushed to the breaking point and started a wildcat strike to protest the unfair and disrespectful contract offer by AHS. As a working emergency room doc I know how essential front-line staff are to providing world-class care to Albertans, and all they're asking for in return is respect and fairness. Will the Premier put care back into health care and order the health minister to go back to the negotiating table with a contract worthy of their service and dedication?

1:50

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are disappointed to see that type of job action that impacts patient care and patient safety. I am understanding that an application around the dispute has been put forward to the quasi-judicial board that handles such matters, and I think it best to be left in their hands.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that the action or, rather, inaction of this government has led to this crisis. Given that the members opposite voted themselves a 34 per cent pay increase and given that the Premier had no problem throwing money around for her leadership campaign, cabinet tours in Jasper and caucus retreats, why is it so hard for this government to find the money to give a measly 3 per cent pay raise to the hard-working men and women, the heart and soul of the health care system, to clean up the blood and vomit and excrement off the floors of the hospital?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. the Deputy Premier just said, Alberta Health Services has an application before the Labour Relations Board, which is being heard at this hour for a

cease-and-desist order on the matter that was raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. With respect to the workers in question I can tell you in an unqualified way that this government has nothing but respect and value and admiration for the work that those workers perform every day throughout our health care system.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about respect. These hard-working men and women clean up the blood, vomit, and excrement off the floors of our hospitals. Given that senior executives are blaming the same front-line staff for the surgery cancellations and the crisis that's been caused and now they're being issued a back-to-work order, will the Premier stop campaigning and put an end to warlord politics and issue a back-to-work order for her health minister to pay these good people what they're worth?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as has been stated several times already, the process of labour negotiations is under way outside of this Chamber. We don't negotiate contracts for employees inside this Chamber. We respect their right to do that, and we'll continue to do so.

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

Emergency Health Services

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that they've already failed in labour negotiations – they've had a year to solve this problem – Albertans are literally dying to get into care. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, and now front-line support staff are speaking up and telling this government that their health care system is broken. Instead of listening and fixing the problem, the Premier and health care minister are covering their eyes and closing their ears and hoping that this will just go away. When will the Premier give her head a shake and stop the PR spin and tell her minister to get serious about reducing the suffering and help Albertans waiting for care?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this is about a labour negotiation. This is about two parties that are in the process of doing their negotiations over contracts. There are legal processes involved in how this works. Frankly, we respect that process a great deal, and we want it to continue.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this is about lack of leadership. Given that in an e-mail in 2006 in the midst of an ER crisis the current health minister says, quote, patients who are seen in ER and admitted to hospital are unable to be moved to acute-care ward beds because those beds are full, and this delays access to treatment and serious bottlenecks develop, end of quote, yet today he says that it's the 17 per cent increase in patients that's the problem, will the minister stand up and please tell us whether he was wrong in 2006, wrong today, or just plain wrong all the time?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, ignoring the negativity, cynicism, and personal attacks that all too frequently come from the other side of the House, what I can tell you is that we had a very productive second meeting yesterday with emergency department physicians from across the province, Alberta Health Services, and the Alberta Medical Association. I want to tell you that the first job of any member of this House should be to stand up and thank those people for what they have achieved in Alberta's emergency departments in the last year.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, as front-line staff I am thanking them for doing what they do each and every day, and this government isn't doing it.

Given that the series of e-mails shows that the current health minister had prior knowledge and did not react to the ER crisis, which is now under review by the Health Quality Council, until after it hit the news and given that it's happening all over again with front-line staff picketing the streets, will the minister take responsibility, stop trying to be a government PR hack, and actually do something to fix the system? Minister, you've been a part of this problem.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it certainly sounds to me like we have yet another conspiracy being alleged in this House. I'm not actually going to dignify it with another response.

In fact, in his earlier question, Mr. Speaker, if I heard him correctly – and I'll stand corrected if the Blues prove me wrong – he made a further statement that people were dying waiting for care, again with no offer of proof. What I will tell you is that this government has reduced the number of patients waiting in acute-care beds for continuing care. We've made significant improvements in the four-hour benchmark.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition question.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a certain minister is a specialist in mental health and, contrary to what that same health minister says, ER wait times are the most important measure of a health care system's performance and that despite the billions thrown at our system, Alberta has the lowest performance measures in this country and this government is failing miserably to meet even their pathetically low measures, will the Minister of Health and Wellness stop warehousing seniors in hospital beds by providing nonprofit home care and long-term care so we can actually use our health care system for those who are sick?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, a physician, of all people, should be able to acknowledge the complexity in a health care system of achieving meaningful gain on a single benchmark. As we've talked about many, many times, the root causes of emergency department wait times in, I might say, the fastest growing province in Canada are the need for additional primary care, a recognition of additional continuing care spaces as a need, which we have acted on – and we are going to achieve 5,300 spaces over five years – and significant resources added to mental health, of which I'd offer the most recent budget as an example of our commitment.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the root causes of our broken health care system sit across the way there, this government and this minister.

Given that the top performance measures are being met in the U.K., where patients are being placed in beds within four hours of arriving in the ER 95 per cent of the time, why with this province's great wealth can't this government provide outcomes even a fraction of those as good as the U.K.? Minister, a fraction.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. leader needs to decide whether he wants to talk about e-mail chains from 2006 or whether he wants a substantive, serious discussion about health policy in this Chamber. If it's the latter, we're willing to come forward. If it's the former, over to you.

Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, health care workers don't care about policy. They care about action. They care about solutions. They want the system fixed. Given that billions of dollars are spent in our health care system with increasingly poor results, it seems obvious that this government wants the public health care system to fail, and this minister has been consulting with them for 10 years to helping it fail because he wants to Americanize it. This is the man who presented the document to privatize health care. Is this government simply planning to wash its hands of a problem it doesn't understand and cannot solve by privately contracting it out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister if you wish.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently we're back onto the conspiracy theory train again, but I will be very proud to tell you that we are having tremendous success. If we look at Calgary and Edmonton, for example, alternate level of care patients, patients waiting in acute care for continuing care went down from 317 in September in Calgary to 160 as of January 24. The trend was similar in Edmonton, with a drop from 202 to 152. We are well on our way to making our five-year goal of 5,300 additional spaces.

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

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like all MLAs I drove home after the Speech from the Throne and the budget last week and, in fact, went for my usual double-double at Tim Hortons in my constituency, and I overheard two elderly gentlemen going back and forth about taxes. They were confused with the PC government's plan. One of them said to me: "Guy, you've got to help us out. What is the PC government going to do about our taxes? Are they going to pick our pockets?" My question is to the Premier. Can you please clear up this confusion? Are you going to pick our pockets after the election?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Every minister in this Chamber signed the three-year business plan. They signed the pledge for this year's budget. Our goal – and I hope the hon. members will help us do it – is to pass the budget in this House before an election happens. If we do that, that's the budget for the rest of the year. They've told us they're going to raise taxes before. They tell us they're going to raise taxes now. The people that they shouldn't trust are over there.

2:00

Mr. Boutilier: I think the member has hurt my feelings.

Given that the Premier can't answer the question, I'll ask it again. Will you take a 30 per cent reduction in the pay increase that you gave yourselves, every one of your members in the front row of cabinet? Will you join the rest of us in Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what 30 per cent pay increase the hon. member might be referring to. If he's referring to the one that happened I think four or five years ago, the hon. member was there. I will say and remind the hon. member that there is a judicial review of the MLA compensation that yourself, Mr. Speaker, and the Members' Services Committee, which is the all-party committee of this Legislature, have undertaken, and we look forward to the results of that review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. Albertans are getting tired of your waffling on answers when it comes to their taxes. No one can seem to get a straight answer out of you, but I'm going to try anyway one more time. In a simple yes or no answer: are you going to raise taxes after the election? Yes or no. Keep it simple for the folks at Tim Hortons.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm confused, obviously, by this hon. member's lack of understanding of what the budget is. In the budget, that is tabled in this House, that we are going to be debating as we move through this – and I hope they enter into the debate because they may learn something. What they may learn is that in this budget for the year 2012-13 there are no new taxes.

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

Labour Negotiations with Hospital Support Staff (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Support workers who do the back-breaking, menial jobs in our hospitals have been treated with contempt by this government for too long. They earn half the average weekly wage in Alberta, yet the government offered them a 2 per cent raise over a three-year contract. That's about 32 cents an hour. My question is to the Premier. Will she intervene with Alberta Health Services to ensure that the janitors, the cleaners, the porters, and the food service workers receive a fair offer which allows them and their families to live with dignity?

Mr. Horner: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that what they're doing is menial. I believe that what they're doing is of tremendous value to the patients and to the system that we have in the publicly funded health care system. We are, out of respect for the negotiating process, going to allow that process to unfold as it should because they have that right, too.

Mr. Mason: These workers have struggled far too long, Mr. Speaker, within the current framework, where their basic rights to withdraw their services are disallowed by this government, and they can't get a fair deal. To ask the workers to go back to a system that's clearly broken and serves the employer and not the employees is most unfair and shows a lack of respect for these workers. Will the Deputy Premier please stand in the House and offer them some fairness in this whole deal?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, because they are in the category of essential workers, there is an arbitration process as well. I'm going to reiterate – and that hon. member should really respect the negotiating process and the process that two parties will go through to establish a contract – that you don't negotiate them on the floor of this House.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UN has already ruled that the labour laws in Alberta are not fair to workers and given that support workers in Alberta's hospitals have only been offered a 32 cents an hour raise and provincial judges just received a \$35,000 raise, cabinet recently voted itself a \$42,000 raise, and the Premier got a \$54,000 raise, how can the Premier look these workers in the eye and tell them that they've been treated fairly?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should be clear with Albertans. Cabinet did not just vote themselves a raise nor did anyone in this Assembly just vote themselves a raise. Members' Services deals with those issues. And from 2008 . . .

Mr. Hinman: Talk about smoke and mirrors.

Mr. Horner: The hon. member says smoke and mirrors. The smoke and mirrors, Mr. Speaker, is when the hon. member says something that happened five years ago and tries to insinuate to Albertans that it's today. And he sits on the committee. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Revenues from VLTs and Slot Machines

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. This government is taking a larger percentage of cash played by Albertans in VLTs and slot machines as revenue than it claims. It is creating the illusion that the odds of winning are far better than they truly are. It is unacceptable that this government intentionally deceives Albertans as to what the risks of VLTs and slot machines are. To the Minister of Finance – and welcome back, sir – what per cent of the money inserted in either a VLT or slot machine is retained as profit by the government?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to address some of the wording that this particular member is using when he's talking about this issue. I just heard him use the word "deceive." I heard him this morning in the media using words like "cook the books" and "a shady form of mathematics." I think, frankly, that is despicable, and I think he owes this Assembly an apology.

However, I will say this in answer to his question. The audited books of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission show that 92 per cent of every dollar that goes into a machine is paid back . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's this government that owes gambling addicts an apology.

Again to the same minister: why did the government start to hide on an annual basis the cash-in, cash-out statistics for VLTs and slot machines, the percentage of profit that you're taking from gamblers? Why did you hide that from them?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, again another allegation that is totally incorrect. No one is hiding anything here. The books of the AGLC are open to the Auditor General. About 12 years ago the Auditor General made some recommendations about accounting practices. The AGLC is now following those recommendations. There's nothing hidden. There's no shady form of mathematics. There is no cooking the books as this member alleges. I repeat: if he cannot prove that, he owes this Assembly an apology.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the AGLC hid that information not only from the Public Accounts Committee, but they hid it from the citizens as well. Again to the Minister of Finance: will the government publicly report on an annual basis the cash-in, cash-out amounts for VLT and slot machine revenue so that Albertans know what the real percentage of profit is that the treasury gets from this form of gambling?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but I believe that's exactly what we do today. The particular member chairs the Public Accounts Committee. The AGLC was before the Public Accounts Committee and has answered all of the questions. I saw a letter that the chairman of the board had written to this

particular member answering all of the questions that he posed. There's nothing hidden here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Education Services for Teen Parents

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Services. Braemar school in Edmonton has had success over many years supporting pregnant teens, but often they struggle in accessing the financial resources to help them to be successful. Mr. Minister, are we letting down this segment of society? Are you aware that this problem exists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I was delighted yesterday to be able to attend Braemar school and the Terra foundation with the Premier and the Minister of Education. We had an opportunity to talk with some of the young moms there about the issues that they face, about their financial struggles, their issues with respect to housing, issues with respect to child care, and, most importantly, their aspirations for themselves and their children. It was a very good morning. We were there because we are actually celebrating ways in which we can work together with the school and the foundation to make it easier for those young women to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Learning of the struggles these young women face, is the newly created Ministry of Human Services doing anything specifically to make sure these teens can access the necessary resources and turn their dreams into reality?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is something that I'm actually very excited about because as an individual and as an MLA for quite a number of years I've been approached by the Terra foundation about what we could do to make it easier for these young women to succeed. We had a number of ministries that were engaged: Education, children and youth services, employment and immigration to name three. With the creation of the Ministry of Human Services we were able to bring that all together so that now we can actually fund Terra and allow Terra to fund these teens for their success.

We've simplified the process for the teens. We've taken a lot of the angst out of the process for them, and they're going to now have a very good chance of being successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Education. In Alberta our high school completion rate continues to be one of the lowest in the country. Does the minister really believe that this kind of programming is going to make a significant difference?

Mr. Lukaszuk: It will make a significant difference in the lives of those young ladies who are benefiting from this program, and that is very important. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, much like the Minister of Human Services has indicated, that I have nothing but admiration for these young women. Despite the circumstances that they have found themselves in in their lives, they are committed to

education. Most importantly, they are committed to the future of their children. We as a government and as a society owe it to them to support them in any way we can so that we ensure that they complete their high school education.

The Speaker: The Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Emergency Health Services

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency medical services workers are now openly talking about people dying before getting care due to delays in the ability to respond to emergencies. They're talking about not only this risk to others but now the growing risk to their own lives and the public's as they try harder and go faster to compensate for a failed system. When will the minister recognize the root cause of this problem and get the Health Quality Council involved to sort out the complexities he's not able to?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to talk to many emergency services workers as well, and while I will acknowledge some of the very serious issues that they shared with me with respect to their feelings about resources and time to enable them to do the job they would like to do for their patients, I have yet to hear one emergency services worker suggest to me that someone has died while waiting for care. I'd be very interested in any further information or documentation on that score because I would take it very seriously.

What I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that despite some new hires, six EMS workers resigned from Edmonton in the past month. No net gain here, Mr. Minister. Edmonton is no longer a desirable place for EMS to work. What are you doing about it?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct that there are particular issues in Edmonton, issues that are cause for concern to both EMS workers and management. I'm pleased to tell this House that as a result of some recent discussions with Alberta Health Services, the management for EMS in this province will be returned to the zone level by May of this year, and that will enable EMS workers, front-line workers, to work directly with management staff in their home communities with respect to addressing these issues.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, when will the minister admit that the bungled takeover of EMS by this province has failed Albertans and call for an independent review with the Health Quality Council?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this government will never admit that acknowledging that EMS workers are front-line health workers and are part of the formal health care system – we will never acknowledge that that was a mistake. That was a correct decision. It's the right policy, and it's the right position to move us forward.

With respect to Edmonton – and I had no difficulty in admitting this in the past in the House – there are questions with respect to the adequacy of units, staffing, and stations. We are well on our way to addressing those issues now. We will continue to work with EMS and AHS to make sure that they are dealt with.

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

Review of Medical Examiner Cases

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Justice has launched an internal review into the files handled by a former employee of the medical examiner's office in Calgary. My questions are all to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. This is the second time in a year that there has been an incident like this stemming from the medical examiner's office. Can the minister offer Albertans an explanation as to why this is happening again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to say that we have confidence in the work of the office of the medical examiner, but it's important for the integrity of the office and the justice system and for public confidence in the justice system that we conduct this review. That's why we are asking that all criminal files of the particular pathologist in question be reviewed. We're committed to a full, transparent process, but we're going to respect the personal, legal privacy rights of the people involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Is the pathologist in question still working for the medical examiner's office?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, the person in question has not been working for Alberta Justice or the medical examiner since September of 2011, but I want to stress, I want to emphasize that the reason for this person leaving has nothing to do with the investigation that we are currently undertaking. This person, as all of our pathologists, was board certified, a highly trained person with credentials to practise in Alberta.

Mr. Johnston: My second supplemental to the same minister: how can Albertans be certain that this won't happen again?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have great confidence in our medical examiner's office. They are highly qualified, highly skilled, they're in great demand around North America, and Alberta is very proud of the staff that we have. We do take the reliability of the system seriously because it's so essential to the operation of our justice system. I should say that there was a previous review, that the hon. member referred to, and after that review we implemented some changes which now call for peer review of anything before it goes to the police.

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

Caregivers for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being developmentally disabled or being a caregiver for a developmentally disabled Albertan should not be a life-threatening experience. A year ago Valerie Wolski, a mental health worker, was strangled to death. Last November David Holmes succumbed to scalding injuries. Rather than addressing the obvious shortcomings, the persons with developmental disabilities central region has appealed the occupational health and safety findings regarding Valerie's death. To the Seniors minister: how can you justify this appeal?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, first, make sure that everybody knows that this was a tragic loss to the

community, that it was a tragic loss to the family, and my thoughts go out to both. A staff member on duty caring for one of the vulnerable Albertans should never have been in this situation. It's not acceptable, and we must do everything we can to make sure an occurrence like this doesn't occur again. PDD Central did appeal on an administrative item on the order.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a problem within the government itself across ministries, occupational health and safety and Seniors, PDD.

Again to the Seniors minister: given that last fall you didn't answer my letter requesting information on PDD Appeal Panel appointees' and PDD board members' qualifications and training, will you now commit to providing those answers to this Assembly?*

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I've been open and transparent about everything I do. I take pride in answering my calls and my letters. I can assure the member that if that did occur, it would be corrected.

I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that occupational health and safety did make some interim recommendations to PDD central. They were all enacted. Action was taken. Not only that, but they shared those orders very quickly with all the PDD regions across the province, and action was taken.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The action taken obviously didn't work because there is an appeal by PDD in front of occupational health and safety. They don't believe the evidence. How much longer and at what cost in lives and families' economic well-being will your ministry continue to hide behind privacy laws which protect the government at the expense of Alberta's most vulnerable?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely ridiculous. This member knows my track record. I've been open. I've been transparent. I've called families. I've called PDD central. I've worked with caregivers. He knows that that's absolutely false.

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

Provincial Spending

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Yesterday the former TD Bank chief economist, Don Drummond, released a lengthy and scathing report that was commissioned by the government of Ontario. This report basically warns the Ontario government that the province will become another Greece if it doesn't get spending under control. I would like to ask the minister if he has had a chance to read the report and determine if there are any recommendations that Alberta should consider and implement.

2:20

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker, I have not. It was just released yesterday, and my recollection is that it's some 500 pages and 300 recommendations, something along that line. I think, though, that what has to be acknowledged in this Assembly is that, thank goodness, from Alberta's standpoint we don't find ourselves in the position that Ontario finds itself in. I would dare say that a lot of

that needs to be attributed to the fact that we've had a 40-year Progressive Conservative government in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my understanding that you were in Toronto yesterday, and I'm wondering if you had a chance to discuss the report and its recommendations with the investment community.

The Speaker: Well, it better apply to Alberta here. We're not worried about what goes on in Ontario in this Assembly.

Minister, have you got something about the Alberta perspective?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the reality of it is that we feel very strongly that Alberta is a strong contributor to Canada, and other parts of the country are benefiting as a result of a strong Alberta. However, we're still part of Canada. Debt, wherever it is in Canada, is not good for Alberta. I think one of the things that there was a strong view on in the financial community was the fact that Alberta has introduced and, I guess, as of last night passed Bill 1, which is going to do a lot of what the report is recommending Ontario follow.

Mr. Vandermeer: My second supplemental to the same minister: would it be the minister's intention, then, to recommend to the Premier that the government of Alberta undergo a similar thorough review of our spending?

Mr. Liepert: As I said in the last answer, Mr. Speaker, I think we're actually ahead of that because we just passed a bill last night, Bill 1, which is going to over the next three years ensure that all departments over a three-year rolling period will have a thorough review of value for money. While this is a report that needs to be acted on at some point in time, we're actually acting right now by passing this legislation.

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

Labour Negotiations with Hospital Support Staff (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On not one but two occasions this government's draconian public-sector labour laws have been judged by the United Nations to be in breach of convention 84, freedom of association. To the minister of labour: when will this government reverse its unfair attack on some of Alberta's hardest working and lowest paid workers and restore to them the fundamental human rights enjoyed by all citizens in democracies world-wide?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have some excellent labour laws in this province, evidenced by the fact that we have one of the lowest rates of work interruption and work stoppage in the country. We have in place appropriate processes to allow people to do collective bargaining and also, in cases where there are essential services involved, to resolve those disputes through mediation and arbitration processes. There are ways to resolve issues in this province, and for the most part they work very well for all parties, and that's evidenced by the fact that the economy in this province is still very strong and working well.

Ms Notley: Well, it's certainly not evidenced today.

Given that this government's commitment to ignore internationally recognized rights to freely associate has systematically

*See page 177, right column, paragraph 4

bullied vulnerable employees into desperate action and given that our draconian labour laws provide no incentive to employers like Alberta Health Services to bargain in good faith, why won't the minister admit that it's his third-world, backwater labour laws that have created today's crisis in our hospitals?

Mr. Hancock: What an absolutely preposterous statement about the situation in Alberta. One could not describe any worse – I'm speechless. The hon. member is absolutely preposterous in what she's saying. In Alberta we have people who go to work every day, that resolve their issues with their employers every day, and there are processes to do collective bargaining and to resolve disputes in an appropriate way, including mediation and arbitration, and those work. We have a disputes resolution process. We have a labour board which is. . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the minister calls appropriate the UN calls illegal. Given that this was reflected in the obnoxious spectre of this Legislature confirming a \$35,000 raise on Monday for judges and then today turning a blind eye to AHS denying a 60-cent-an-hour raise to these good people up there, why won't the minister admit that this government is so out of touch with fairness that they need fair labour laws so that maybe Alberta's workers can remind them?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member just continues to display ignorance. We have a process for resolving issues. One of those processes is a judicial inquiry commission, which is mandated by the courts to resolve issues with respect to judges because they do not have the right to negotiate or bargain, so there's an inquiry process which resolves their issues. The government cannot dispute that without putting them in a position to say why we disagree with that inquiry. There are other processes for other workers, and they work very well.

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

Safety Standards for Farm Workers

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Federation of Labour is making it clear that transportation laws need to be tightened for farm workers after the tragedy in Ontario with a van full of farm workers who suffered horrible deaths. To the Minister of Transportation. Like twinning the highway from Edmonton to Fort McMurray is a practical, common-sense idea that will save lives, so will applying occupational health and safety standards to all Albertans, as the Premier promised. Will this minister make riding in the boxes of pickup trucks illegal for all Albertans?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm glad that the hon. member opposite recognized all the good work that's being done on highway 63.

If I can defer the first part of the question to the hon. Minister of Human Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was talking about the farm workers in the backs of pickup trucks.

To the same minister again: if it is illegal for members of this House to ride in the box of a pickup truck because it is unsafe, why isn't it illegal for a farm worker to do the same? Is a farm

worker's health and safety less important than a politician's, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very glad to research the exact details of the hon. member's questions, but as I recall, it is not legal for individuals, whether they be farm workers, whether they be youth, whether they be individuals of any description, to ride in the back of a pickup truck on our highways. I think that is the law right now, and I think it's in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about making it illegal for all Albertans anywhere.

To the same minister again: given that this government's own throne speech calls for Alberta's farmers to be the best in the world, can the minister tell this House once and for all why the best farm workers in the world don't get the best safety standards in the world?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will not agree with this hon. member. The farm workers and the agriculture industry in this province, in this country are the best in the world. I would reiterate the comments that I made previously about the laws that pertain to our highways. What is done on private land, on agricultural land, is regulated by Human Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Emergency Room Wait Times (continued)

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard from the Minister of Health and Wellness yesterday that Alberta Health Services will not be meeting its four- and eight-hour emergency department wait time targets. Now, this news raises curiosity for Albertans as well as a number of questions. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why won't the wait time targets be met by next month's deadline?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons for that. Most notably, as was referred to earlier, we have had a 17 per cent increase in emergency department visits across the province since November 2010. We expect that demand to continue as Alberta's economy continues to boom and more and more people move to the province. That said, there have been tremendous efficiencies gained within the hospitals over the last year due to the very hard work of physicians and other professionals.

2:30

Mr. Webber: To the same minister: what efforts are being made, then, to reduce the wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are several. In terms of the overall health care system we're continuing our work to expand primary care networks and family care clinics, making sure that people have a place to go in or near their home community to access primary health care and do not need to go to the emergency department. Our work continues to expand continuing care capacity. We are on track to open another thousand continuing care spaces this year. In addition, we've allocated \$25 million in the budget for enhanced home care, and we are hoping that this will prevent the need for people to be admitted unnecessarily to hospital.

Mr. Webber: Okay. To the same minister: what is being done to address the bed-blocker issue, which does have a direct downstream impact on the people waiting in emergency departments?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, while I personally try not to use the term “bed blockers,” it does refer to those individuals who are awaiting placement in a long-term care facility in an acute-care bed in our system. As I mentioned in response to an earlier question this afternoon, we have seen those numbers of patients decrease significantly over the last year. I think opening additional continuing care capacity is part of the answer to this. I also think and I’ve been told by Alberta Health Services that a number of these patients waiting in hospital could conceivably go home with enhanced home care support, and that’s what we’re working on now.

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

Municipal Funding

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Wildrose caucus and other MLAs enjoyed a wonderful breakfast with AUMA members, and it was refreshing to hear the honest and open discussion about the problematic grants for municipalities in our province. We listened to the AUMA president, Linda Sloan, hit the ball out of the park as she once again reiterated their position that millions of dollars of government grants are going out according to how people vote provincially. As a result, she received an enthusiastic standing ovation from her colleagues. Does the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who did show up, now agree with the Premier’s chief of staff? Is she a liar?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it’s another absurd accusation. In fact, this afternoon we’re going to be releasing the numbers by municipality for MSI funding. I’ve been very clear. It’s a strict guideline that was created in conjunction with AUMA and AAMD and C, and I have the latest numbers that show that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and Airdrie-Chestermere had the largest increases to MSI this year based on the formula.

Mr. Hinman: That’s the problem, Mr. Speaker. They’re talking about the 23 other government grants, and they focus on the one that they’re handcuffed on.

Given that former mayor Glenn Taylor, who was speaking at this morning’s breakfast, spoke about the numerous conversations that he’d had with many in the room about the bullying and the intimidation tactics of this government and how provincial grants are used for partisan purposes, does the minister, then, think that he, too, is a liar?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, what’s impressive is that they’re talking about partisan politics and their quotes are coming from partisan people about this government. My experience today at the AUMA breakfast as I wandered around was complete support for the MSI program that we have, for the formulas that we use, and the support and partnership we have with municipalities from one end of this province to the other.

Mr. Hinman: Really, Mr. Speaker. Partisanship? To my understanding, the minister is good friends with Darren Aldous, the past president of AUMA. Given that Darren also has stated that many decisions have been made for political reasons, with

some MLAs aiming for infrastructure announcements in their ridings, does the Minister of Municipal Affairs think that Darren along with all the other mayors and councillors who are critical of this government’s funding are all pathological liars?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I just spoke with Mr. Aldous this morning – we are good friends – and he never said any such thing to me, so I’m not going to comment on what this member may report because for all I know, he’s misquoting that very good individual, who has represented his communities and the AUMA very well in his membership.

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

Funding for Diabetes Self-management Supplies

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day in Alberta more than 50 people are diagnosed with diabetes. It was good to hear today that the province has added coverage for some crucial diabetic supplies and medication to help Albertans manage this chronic condition. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Coverage was announced for diabetic test strips, essential for monitoring the management of diabetes. Can the minister tell us why it has taken so long to provide coverage for these critical supplies?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this morning’s news that Alberta will cover a whole range of diabetic supplies, including test strips for Albertans, is indeed welcome. I can’t think of an MLA on any side of this House who hasn’t heard from constituents about this concern over the last several years. This announcement will see \$13.3 million invested in supplying not only diabetic test strips but lancets, syringes, and other supplies for insulin-treated diabetics across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. This coverage will be welcome news to many Albertans who pay between \$30 and \$60 per week just to monitor their diabetes. Can the minister tell us who is eligible for this coverage and who isn’t?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eligibility is available to all Albertans who are members of either the seniors’ drug plan, the nongroup plan, or our palliative care Alberta Blue Cross benefit plan. Anyone in Alberta is in a position to take advantage of that. Coverage is limited to \$600 a year per individual. We currently have approximately 206,000 diabetics in Alberta; 90 to 95 per cent of those people are type 2 diabetics, and a number of them will be insulin treated along with type 1 diabetics. So a very large number of people will be eligible.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last question to the same minister. Today’s announcement only addresses the management of diabetes, which is good. Can the minister tell us what we’re doing to prevent people from getting this disease in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m proud to say that

Alberta is leading the country in our efforts to prevent diabetes and other conditions that lead to diabetes such as obesity. Obesity itself accounts for 90 per cent of type 2 diabetes cases. Our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Corriveau, has been a champion in promoting action on the obesity front on the national stage. As the co-chair of the Public Health Network he is leading federal, provincial, and territorial efforts to promote healthy weights and curb childhood obesity.

Mr. Speaker, this is something about which we should all be concerned. I don't think we can remind ourselves enough that this generation of children in Canada is expected to have a shorter life expectancy than the generation that . . .

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

School Board Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cuts, job losses, deficits, overcrowded classes: these are the hard realities school boards have to face every year thanks to this government's mismanaged budgets and unreliable funding. Sustainable funding for our children's future is what should have been done right from the start. To the Minister of Education: will the minister stand up for equality of opportunity and promise to review the funding formula that penalizes our rural school boards?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for what should have been done right from the start because that would have been Liberal Premier Rutherford that would have perhaps done it right from the start, but I can speak to this budget. This is the first budget in the history of the province that provides three-year sustainable funding to school boards and allows school boards to make very flexible decisions within their jurisdictions to reflect their individual pressures.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Premier Rutherford, Premier Manning, and Premier Lougheed had it all over these most recent examples.

To the same minister: given that distance and commuting are major challenges for rural families, will the minister commit to freezing transportation fees for rural schools, saving parents hundreds of dollars?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as you probably know very well, the Education budget is on the floor of the Legislature. That member will have ample opportunity to debate every line item of my budget in the next few days, and I will be able to explain all those lines in detail. At the end of the day I would remind this member that over the next three years our budget will be increasing from \$6.8 billion to \$7.1 billion, which is phenomenal.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given that schools in Alberta are still short 450 teaching positions and that rural communities face hardships on a daily basis, will this government increase funding for rural school boards?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I just said. Over the next three years the budget will increase from \$6.8 billion to \$7.1 billion. We are spending approximately \$35 million per day on school boards right now, and the member will have ample opportunity to ask individual questions during the budget.

2:40

The Speaker: The Department of Education estimates will be featured in this Assembly on Tuesday, March 6, starting at approximately 3 p.m. The building is open to all citizens in the province of Alberta.

Now we have an additional statement to be made by a member of Executive Council. Hon. Minister of Seniors, do you wish to provide some additional information?

Caregivers for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (continued)

Mr. VanderBurg: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to further clarify a question that I had from the Member for Calgary-Varsity, here's my letter of December 12 in response to his letter of November 22.*

I am writing in follow-up to your November 22, 2011, inquiry to the Persons with Developmental Disabilities . . . Appeal Secretariat office regarding when and how appointments are made to the PDD Appeal Panel. I am pleased to provide the following information.

I think the accusation that the member made was clearly inappropriate. Sir, I would ask that you ask for his apology.

The Speaker: Well, first of all, under our rules once I recognize a member of Executive Council, it means that the person who raised the question may ask an additional question, so we'll see where we go with this.

Go ahead.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only did the hon. minister not provide information on PDD Appeal Panel appointees and PDD board members' qualifications and training, as I asked. My question would be, obviously, to the Seniors minister, but he can pass it on to the Minister of Human Services. Why can't your two ministries get your acts together to protect not only disabled individuals but disabled individuals' caregivers? Why does it have to be an appeal process?

The Speaker: I clearly saw a difference of view here, so I'm going to ask that this matter be studied with the Blues over the weekend, and if there's a point of privilege that the hon. minister would like to raise, he can raise it on Tuesday. Okay?

We will proceed with the Routine in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Loss of Trust in the Government

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today another group of health care givers has said: enough. Doctors, nurses, EMS workers have been saying it. Caregivers in PDD have been saying it. Even astute businesspeople in this province have been condemning the mismanagement in this province. Now the people who keep our hospitals running safely and smoothly under daily crises couldn't take it anymore. Maintenance and cleaning staff, lab technicians, and porters took an unprecedented step to a wildcat strike.

What pushes them to this extremity? It is the loss of trust and government corruption. This government refuses to do its job. Citizens in all walks of life speak of being disregarded, dismissed, and bullied, and increasingly people are saying: enough is enough. It's troubling when one's contribution is devalued or one is

*See page 174, left column, paragraph 4

silenced. It's intolerable when this disrespect interferes with the ability of conscientious workers to care for their fellow human beings, when workers return home aware that they are unable to meet the standard expected in their work, when daily they place at risk people that they are supposed to be caring for, when maintenance doesn't have the resources to properly fix a damaged floor or pipe, when cleaning staff are pushed beyond their physical limits and forced to leave conditions they would not accept in their homes.

This government has broken its trust not once but many times to those charged with caring and protecting our most vulnerable citizens. The evidence of incompetence and corruption is now undeniable, and the fat cats in power must be held accountable. Albertans at all levels are seeing this gross mismanagement of people and resources and the cover-ups and the lack of accountability. This must stop before our spirits are broken and more lives are lost. This government is no longer a source of solution. It is the source of our problems. When trust is gone, collapse is not far off. It's time for this government to go.

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

Random Acts of Kindness Week

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 13 to 19 is Random Acts of Kindness Week, and this so fits in with what I started with my kids a long time ago and have used as a mantra ever since, that if we all play kindly in the sandbox, we all win.

A random act of kindness can be volunteering in communities, supporting charities, or lending a helping hand to neighbours and friends. A simple smile and eye contact is surprisingly powerful. Albertans are renowned for their big hearts, community spirit, and the tremendous care they show for one another and the world around them.

With this special week in mind, I'm pleased to share an important call to action on behalf of Alberta's Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee, a group of 15 dedicated young people from all across the province who help promote awareness of bullying and work closely with us to create safe and caring schools and communities. The youth committee is encouraging Albertans to go to www.b-free.ca and share their random acts of kindness stories with the world. They're asking us to sit with someone at lunch who is usually left out or send a supportive text message to a friend who's been bullied or put down.

The smallest act of kindness or encouragement can make the biggest difference in anyone's life. Their call to action is about coming together to create a caring, respectful society and leaving bullying behind, one act of kindness at a time. Go to the committee's b-free website, submit your act of kindness story, and help inspire even more compassion and respect for others. Together we can make a bully-free Alberta.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give you oral notice of my intent to make a motion under Standing Order 30. Do I read the motion into the record now?

The Speaker: No. You're just advising notice. I'll call on you later.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually have two tablings now. First, I'd like to table the partisan quote from the friend of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Darren Aldous, which says that "without certain and predictable funding, cities are not able to do simple long-term planning. Many decisions have been made for 'political reasons,' he said, with some MLAs aiming for infrastructure announcements in their riding." This is from the *Herald* on the 16th of June, 2011.

My second tabling is on behalf of an Albertan, Anne Landry. I would like to table the required five copies of documents recording her journey to try and get her own file information. Anne Landry feels that she has been treated unfairly by the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner and has filed court proceedings in Alberta Court of Queen's Bench. I have the required five copies of the certified record of proceedings that she has filed. Ms Landry is hoping that by tabling these documents, it will help shed light on the ordeal that she has had to undergo just to try to get information on her very own file.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of electricity bills that 14 Albertans have sent to the NDP opposition, showing significantly increased and higher electricity costs.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite amount of copies of two letters from constituents. The first is from Vic Neufeld, who makes \$35,000 a year and whose wife is a person with a developmental disability, who is not receiving AISH at this time but otherwise would be able to. The reason she can't is because her husband is making \$35,000. It's just something she wanted the Legislature to be aware of.

The second is regarding an individual, Mr. Paul Thebeau, from my constituency as well, who was denied over and over a requisition to get an MRI test that he wanted his wife to get at a private clinic and was willing to pay for but could not get the requisition for some reason, even though there was capacity. It seems like a very brutal hole in the system, and it didn't make a lot of sense to him.

I'm tabling both of those.

2:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced to you and through you Samy Mukadi, Albert Mbuyi, and Rene Tahibula, who are members of the Alberta Congolese community, and they have asked me to table this document which begins:

We, the members of the Congolese Diaspora in Alberta accuse the Canadian mining businesses for illicit operation in Congo. This is the second letter that we write on the post election crisis that continues to prevail in the Democratic Republic of Congo today. As in the first letter, of December 15 2011, we condemn and accuse . . .

I am tabling the list of accusations, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Dr. Taft: Yes. We would love to hear on this side of the Assembly what the government has planned for next week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Order Paper is pretty clear, but to fulfill the Routine of order on Tuesday, February 21, in the afternoon it will be day 6 of consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne, but after we will be in Committee of Supply with respect to the estimates of the Ministry of Finance and as per the Order Paper should time permit.

On Wednesday, February 22, in the afternoon it will be day 7 of consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne, but the Committee of Supply will sit from 3 till 6 p.m. or such time as it needs to consider the estimates of Executive Council and as per the Order Paper thereafter.

On Thursday, February 23, in the afternoon it will be day 8 of consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne, and we will deal with second reading of Bill 2, Education Act; Bill 4, St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act; Bill 5, Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act; and third reading of Bill 3, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have an application under Standing Order 30. I would refer all members to their standing orders so that they can understand what we're talking about here now. This is a request to basically abandon the normal Routine that's found in the standing orders. This deals with a matter of urgent importance. The urgent importance is not the issue at stake; it is the process and the procedures. So I want these comments – I will recognize a number of speakers if they choose to participate – to be a very, very fine discussion on why the Routine should be abandoned, not the issue itself.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Work Stoppages by Hospital Support Staff

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, a work stoppage today by general support service workers at at least two Edmonton hospitals, work action threatening patient welfare and undermining public confidence in this government's ability to manage Alberta's public health care system.

The Speaker: Hon. member, can you just bear with me for a second, please? You read the motion into the record, and this should be circulated to all members. But we have one other issue because if we agree to what your request is, we can't get to the other issue. So I've got to deal with the Government House Leader on his point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not been raising points of order much during this session so far, but there

was a situation today when the Leader of the Official Opposition offended the proceedings of the House under 23(h) of the standing orders, making an allegation against another member, and 23(i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member.

In question period at that particular time the member was addressing the hon. minister of health and accused the hon. minister of health of, among a number of things, personally trying to undermine the health system and drive us to a – I don't have the benefit of the Blues – privatized American health system.

This issue has been raised a number of times in the House. It's been made clear by the Premier, by the minister of health, by anybody who's asked what the government's direction is with respect to a publicly funded health system. It's also been very clear that the minister of health is not on that agenda, and the Leader of the Official Opposition knows it full well.

It's inflammatory rhetoric. It is unconscionable for him to knowingly misstate in such a blatant manner in order to make his point when he knows full well that what he's saying is not true, and I would ask that the hon. member be asked to withdraw those statements.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you're speaking now?

Dr. Taft: I am. I have the heavy burden today, Mr. Speaker, of filling in the shoes of our House leader – so I'm going to do my best here – and part of that responsibility is to speak to this issue.

I will cut immediately to the chase because I know you appreciate that. I refer to a document here, Mr. Speaker, which I'm pretty certain has been tabled in this Assembly before. If it hasn't, I can table it again. These are PowerPoint slides and a document that's dated July 12, 2010. It includes the name of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and it's a legislation briefing to, I believe, the caucus of the day. It specifically refers to a policy shift, and I'm quoting now here, Mr. Speaker: consider private insurance options for limited health services; regulations could enable and regulate scope and operation of private insurance.

It's pretty clear from this that, in fact, this is a briefing given to the government caucus about 18 months ago with the name of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on it that was advocating a shift to private health insurance, and that's part of the debate here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there are any grounds whatsoever for a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, I'll give you an opportunity to say something, if you want to, seeing as you seem to be the focus of this.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, my job here is not to continue to deny accusations presented by members opposite. I have spoken to this matter in the House before. I have made it clear that I am not the author of the document that was tabled in this House. I question the basis upon which any member of this House would attempt to connect me to the document either as an author or as someone who would personally attest to any statement or belief or other piece of information that may be communicated by the document.

I am on record, Mr. Speaker, as someone who defends, supports, and works to improve the value of our publicly funded health care system. I think my record both prior to becoming an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly and prior to my appointment as Minister of Health and Wellness bears this out. I could point to any number of public records and media reports that may provide support to this.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that the continued tabling of and reference to this document, other e-mails, and other purported pieces of evidence to attempt to assign a belief system or an attitude or any other motive is in fact an insult both to me as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and, I would humbly suggest, to the proceedings of this House.

I renew my objection to this. I have no way of controlling, other than through appeals to Mr. Speaker, the conduct of other members, and I would consider it appropriate in the circumstances that the hon. leader be asked to withdraw the remark. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, one of the really important rules that we follow is found in *Beauchesne* 494, where it reads that acceptance of the word of a member about matters concerning themselves should be accepted. We've heard this today. I hope that will become the norm.

Secondly, there's a bigger problem, though, than all of this. We don't have these issues, you know, if everybody followed the rules they signed their name to. The members signed a document that said: no preambles on second or third questions. If everybody would remember that they signed that – I've been hearing this week about people wanting to sign documents or something. I repeat that. The members have signed that. No preambles. Willingly and enthusiastically everybody agreed to it.

3:00

So I read the second question.

Mr. Speaker, health care workers don't care about policy. They care about action. They care about solutions. They want the system fixed. Given that billions of dollars are spent in our health care system with increasingly poor results, it seems obvious that this government wants the health care system to fail, and this minister has been consulting with them for 10 years to helping it fail because he wants to Americanize it. This is the man who presented the document to privatize health care.

The way the *Hansard* people have identified this, they've come up with about six different sentences. Finally, you get to the question.

Is this government simply planning to wash its hands of a problem it doesn't understand and cannot solve by privately contracting it out?

You know, if we had no preambles, we wouldn't have most of these. And you all signed your name to it. This is what I find so astounding. After having to read through the rules, this is a daily violation on preambles.

I'm going home this weekend, and I'm going to read my memo to everybody, and I'm going to look at the document that has all the House leaders signing this, no preambles, and all their caucuses being enthusiastic about it, no preambles. When I come back on Tuesday, we'll see if anybody can remember other than me, who will stand up and interject.

Okay. We've clarified all of this. We've heard the statement of the member. We know what *Beauchesne* 494 is all about. We'll come back on Tuesday, and we'll try to be nice to one another.

Work Stoppages by Hospital Support Staff (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you read the motion into the record.

Dr. Taft: Yes.

The Speaker: I will give you a number of minutes to explain the reason for your urgency petition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the issue here is urgency; it's not the substance of it. I will be working under probably the usual references for this sort of debate, *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 and 585; *Beauchesne*, the several paragraphs from 387 to 398.

Marleau and Montpetit says that the issue needs to be specific and urgent and important, and that just requires an ever-so-brief review of the facts on the ground to demonstrate the urgency and the specificity of it. What we have, Mr. Speaker, are some hundreds of support workers at acute-care hospitals who have walked off the job today due to a breakdown in labour negotiations. There has been a cancellation of a significant number of surgeries as a result.

Because of widespread support for the cause our understanding is that the walkout appears to have spread from Edmonton's two largest hospitals, the Royal Alex and the University, to facilities across many areas of the province, including Leduc, Cold Lake, Smoky Lake, Boyle, the Northeast health centre. So this appears to be, I think, a very urgent issue. It's hard to think of something that would be more urgent than people's health care, you know, people's surgery and so on.

It's very specific. We're talking about a well-defined, specific, addressable issue. I think on those grounds the situation meets the requirements of *Marleau and Montpetit* 584.

This is, Mr. Speaker, a nonpartisan issue. This is not an issue that's being driven by any political party particularly; it's being driven by the hearts and the passions and the concerns of the people involved regardless of their politics.

As to the urgency of it, Mr. Speaker, and just for the benefit of those in the gallery, this is about how the issue could be addressed through means other than the Assembly. I don't believe there are those. There's no government bill on the Order Paper specific to this. There's no private member's bill specific to this issue. In fact, I don't think there's anything on the Order Paper that addresses this. There are no government motions.

Really, we are on the brink of a long weekend. We do know, Mr. Speaker, that on long weekends things like accident rates and emergency demands surge. This issue, for all we know, could be engulfing the entire province by the time this Assembly meets again on Tuesday afternoon. I think what happened today at the Royal Alex and the University is like a spark set to kindling. This kindling is right across the province, and we may find that by the time the long weekend is over, Alberta's health care system is in widespread upheaval because of this. And between now and Tuesday afternoon, when we reconvene, there isn't another chance for us as legislators to address the issue.

It is so pressing – and I'm referring here specifically to *Beauchesne*'s 389. It is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." The public has an enormous interest in the functioning of our health care system. Any one of us over the next few days could need that service or, indeed, will probably know people who need that service, so it is a pressing public interest.

I think that the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately because, Mr. Speaker, there is simply no other forum in which it could occur. We have no other means as legislators to address the issue. That is the combination of factors, I believe, that makes this absolutely suited and appropriate for an emergency debate of this Assembly.

I've kept my comments brief, Mr. Speaker, because I think the point is so strong that it speaks for itself. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would behoove me to speak to this in two particular ways. The first is that the motion itself, in my view, should be ruled out of order by yourself. In *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, page 114, 391 says that "subjects excluded by those rules cannot be brought forward . . . such as a matter under adjudication by a court of law." It is, I think, very much public knowledge and, certainly, something you can take advisement of that it is not legal to strike in certain areas and particularly with respect to hospitals.

I would not purport to put my own viewpoint as to what the nature of this job action that was referred to is, but I can tell you that it's before the Labour Relations Board, which is an adjudicatory body. It is a body that is tasked with hearing these particular claims. It's independent, and it is charged with ruling on these particular claims as to whether or not this is a legal strike. It is doing that this afternoon, so it is inappropriate for this House to engage in a discussion about this particular incident at this particular time because it is a labour matter which is before the Labour Relations Board.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would indicate that while the issue of the health and safety of people in our hospitals is clearly an important matter for the public, a debate this afternoon in this House is not an appropriate way to involve ourselves in what is essentially a labour dispute. In fact, perusal of the legislation will make it very clear that if, in fact, this is an illegal job action, which is the matter before the Labour Relations Board, there would be sanction or ruling by the Labour Relations Board.

Also, there are appropriate mechanisms for resolving the dispute. It's not a such a matter that there's no way for the dispute to be resolved. There are mediation and arbitration processes available to the parties. If parties felt aggrieved by any of the processes, they could avail themselves of those dispute resolution mechanisms. So for this House to resolve itself this afternoon to discuss this matter, which is essentially at the root a job action, while it's before the Labour Relations Board and while there is at law methodology for resolving the dispute is quite inappropriate.

That does not at all deal with the issue of whether or not this is an urgent and important matter for the public. Obviously, the care of the public is an important matter to this government and to all Albertans. That is why there is the legislation in place precisely to deal with these sorts of matters.

It's not an appropriate matter for the House this afternoon while it's under this sort of discussion and while it's before the Labour Relations Board.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. And I caution again that the issue here is urgency and the changing of the Routine, not the issue. I'll remind that to the Government House Leader as well. Not the issue. It's the urgency of the debate in this Chamber.

Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, my comments start on that point, that what we are talking about today is urgency. As has already been identified, we are discussing a work stoppage that debate might conclude has been incited by the conduct of Alberta Health Services in their bargaining efforts.

The Speaker: And here we go.

Ms Notley: I'm just stating the facts.

The Speaker: Again, I have to focus.

Ms Notley: I'm about to move on.

The Speaker: Please do.

Ms Notley: Okay.

The Speaker: Because it's going to be 4:30 and you'll still be talking to one another about it.

Ms Notley: In terms of urgency the matters are in fact unfolding as we speak. As we speak, Mr. Speaker. It's a matter that I think has extended beyond the two locations noted in the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview to other locations as well. Hence, it grows exponentially as matters of minutes and hours go by, and that speaks to urgency.

As well, at this point there are actually no mechanisms in place to control it outside this Assembly, I would submit, because, in fact, notwithstanding the points made by the House leader, the very fact that we're in this position is a function of the other strategies and other mechanisms having failed. The labour relations regime has failed. The laws have resulted in people taking action because they for whatever reason do not see them as applying to their situation. So the other mechanisms are not effectively working right now; hence, the government has lost control of the situation.

The point has already been made that there's no other place on the legislative agenda for us to discuss this.

The Speaker: That's the only subject matter that I want to hear about.

Ms Notley: That and urgency.

As I've said, there's no other place between now and Tuesday where we could even begin to talk about it and, quite frankly, I don't think we could on Tuesday either.

As I've just noted, the matters are unfolding so quickly that it would be short sighted to think that urgency and emergency would not occur repeatedly over the course of the next four days. Those emergencies would relate to patient care, patient safety, worker safety, the safety of our employees who work within the health care system, and, as I've said already, the overall public confidence in our health care system.

I would also on the issue of urgency, Mr. Speaker, refer you to some elements of precedent in that in this House urgency has been found to be in place when we were talking about the availability of vaccinations. I believe it was about two years ago that we had an emergency debate on that issue. I believe it was a little over a year ago that the overall issue of confidence in the public health care system was also deemed to warrant debate on the basis of urgency as a result of various and sundry allegations about engagement by political figures in the health care system. Regardless, because it dealt with health care and because it reflected and impacted on the public confidence, this Legislature determined that it was, in fact, urgent and warranted a vote.

As I've said before, there are alternative actions to resolving it, and those actions are things that are within the scope of this Assembly and this government as directed by this Assembly, so the mechanisms for resolving it are appropriately discussed in this setting. As I've said, it's not a matter that is being fully and appropriately adjudicated in a court of law. One element of it is, but certainly the overall urgent matters will not be dealt with at the Labour Relations Board today or anytime soon. So based on the clear examples given by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview of the specific threats to the health and safety of Albertans over the

course of the next five days, it seems very clear on the face of it that these matters warrant a finding of urgency on your part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think we've had enough. We keep hearing these arguments about whether or not this is urgent. You never get to the question of if the Speaker actually declares that it is urgent. If you want to deal with a procedural argument for another hour and 20 minutes, I'm okay with that, too, but I think that we should have some prudence here in terms of what we're talking about.

I want all members to look at Standing Order 30, please, in their Standing Orders so that everybody is up to date on it and understands exactly what we're talking about. Standing Order 30(2) provides that a "Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he . . . considers relevant to the question of urgency," and it is the role of the chair to rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2). The Member for Edmonton-Riverview has met the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office by providing the required notice at 11:07 this morning. The motion reads as follows:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, a work stoppage today by general support service workers at at least two Edmonton hospitals, work action threatening patient welfare and undermining public confidence in this government's ability to manage Alberta's public health care system.

It has been noted that the relevant parliamentary authorities on the subject are pages 689 to 696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 390.

On the issue of urgency of debate the matter raised by the hon. member arose only this morning, so the member's request is timely. In addition, the chair notes that there will be no other opportunity for this matter to be considered in the Assembly as there are no items on the Order Paper under which such a debate could occur. And although the chair is not bound by precedent, the chair notes that there have been several recent emergency debate requests involving the health care system that have been found by the chair, in this case the same person, to be in order, including those on March 14, 2011; November 18, 2010; and October 25, 2010. In addition, the chair granted the request for leave in a matter involving a strike of health care workers on May 24, 2000. Accordingly, the chair finds that the request for leave is in order.

Now, the rules governing the procedure once the chair finds the request for leave to be in order are as follows. Standing Order 30(3) requires the question to be put to a vote of this Assembly. If there are objections to the question, then the chair will ask those members who support the motion to rise in their places. If 15 or more members rise, the debate will proceed, and each member who wishes to speak will have 10 minutes to do so until all who wish to speak have done so or until the normal hour of adjournment. If at least five members rise but less than 15, the question whether the member has leave to move adjournment of the ordinary business is put immediately and, if necessary, is determined by division. If fewer than five members rise, the motion will not proceed.

The question is: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? All those in favour, say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Speaker: Okay. I've heard both of them. Let's see how many will rise. Well, we certainly have that number between five and 14, so I will now put another question, a simple question, a majority decision. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:19 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

3:30

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	MacDonald	Sherman
Chase	Mason	Swann
Hinman	Notley	Taft
Kang		

Against the motion:

Ady	Klimchuk	Prins
Amery	Leskiw	Rogers
Berger	Liepert	Sarich
Calahasen	Lund	Vandermeer
Campbell	McFarland	Weadick
Elniski	McQueen	Webber
Goudreau	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Groeneveld	Olson	Xiao
Hancock	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Horne		

Totals: For – 10 Against – 28

[The motion to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance lost]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Education Act

[Adjourned debate February 15: Mr. Denis]

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Speaker: On the Education Act.

Mr. MacDonald: You bet.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Certainly, we're getting another copy or another version of the Education Act. We had one which was distributed throughout our communities in the summer, and this version has come before the House now. There was a lot of work and there was a lot of effort put into the original act, or the original change to the act, I should say, by the former Minister of Education. There was considerable public expense and a lot of

public relations exercised regarding that former document. Now we have before us this afternoon the latest version.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, to go through this. We're talking about access to education, opportunities for learning, charter schools, private schools, responsibilities and dispute resolution – it's interesting to note that Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week is mentioned in this act; I don't think that applies to this government in their relationship with the AUMA, but that's another matter – student discipline, the student advisory board, complex education needs tribunal, the attendance board, board powers and elections. There was some concern in the past about section 51 here, the natural person powers. I understand that boards have been consulted widely and extensively and are now satisfied. At least, I hope they are; I haven't heard from them that they are not.

We can go on here about board procedures, investigations, elections and trustees, conflict of interest and disqualification, structure of school authorities, finance and property, the Alberta school foundation fund, the taxing authority, payment into the fund, default. There is another very important section on special school tax levy, collection of taxes, borrowing, and then we get to part 7, education professions and occupations.

I was reading last week, Mr. Speaker, about the problems in America. The Minister of Finance would be cognizant of those problems after his recent travels to New York and to Boston and to various other places. Certainly, I was surprised to learn in a policy paper what America has to do to solve some of its problems. One of the suggestions made was that they had to increase the education of their public school teachers. Public school teachers in some American states had difficulty providing sound or adequate science and math instruction to the public school students. I thought: "Wow, we certainly don't have that problem in Alberta. We have excellent, qualified teachers."

The author of this report went on at length to explain how the Americans could actually improve the next generation of American workers and at the same time American taxpayers by improving the education system. There are lessons in this for all of us, certainly, but I must say, after having three members of our family graduate from Edmonton public schools, that the teachers are well qualified and do an excellent job of helping our students out.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is extensive, but there are certain things that I think we should emphasize in the course of debate. Certainly bullying prevention: there are lessons for all of us on that. We must encourage partnerships between the parents, the trustees, and the boards. I think education professionals are included in that partnership. There have to be partnerships with postsecondary education institutions. We should focus the public education system on student success. That's certainly, I think, laudable from all sides of this House.

Now, there are some things in this bill that I haven't seen, and I spent some time reading it. We can go back to the Learning Commission. That was quite a document. For a while it was a guiding principle or guiding force for this government. This government worked very hard at implementing many of the recommendations from the Learning Commission, but it has recently failed particularly with working on the very, very important issue of class sizes and education funding.

I don't want to pull out the fiscal plan from this year's budget and remind this House of the additional money that is put aside to meet the requirements of small class sizes. Hopefully, it will be

used for that. We'll have to watch, and we'll have to see, but hopefully, Mr. Speaker, it will be used for that. We need to ensure that we remember the recommendations from the Learning Commission, particularly around class sizes and class size initiatives.

3:40

We need to ensure that there is stable, predictable funding for public education. We have to remember that public education is an investment. I heard members of this House say that as recently as this week. They are absolutely right. This is an investment in the future. It's not an expense. If we are to diversify our economy in the future, we're going to have to have a skilled, well-educated workforce that can compete in many, many different economic sectors. A public education system is the best way to lay that solid foundation.

I know there are those that think: well, let's let the private sector deal with this. But the public education system allows all families, regardless of family income, to get a good, solid, sound start. That's why public education is so needed and so necessary.

Over the years we have been told that particularly in central areas of the city, Mr. Speaker, we don't need all of the public schools, that we don't need them any longer, that we don't have a student population that merits keeping these schools open. Public schools are not factories. Public schools are not places that should be judged on the size of the student body. Public schools are part of a community. There are some small schools that work for families and for students.

I was surprised last spring, Mr. Speaker, to come to the Legislative Assembly, to the steps on a Sunday morning, and see a group of concerned parents from different rural regions of this province come down to let their opinions be known about what they thought of pending school closures in their districts. One group was from around Barrhead, and the other group was from around Lougheed. I had an interesting talk with them. I went over to the Annex, and I got them each a copy of the Education annual report. They were astonished at the information in there. They surprised me because as taxpayers they didn't realize that their government would provide this information to them.

It was a nice, sunny Sunday morning, and we had quite a discussion around the financial statements of their respective public school boards. They told me the importance of their local community school, their public school. That's in rural areas. Certainly, in central areas of Edmonton this has been an issue that's been going on for quite some time. We have closed dozens of fine public schools. The argument has been made that we don't have the students.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this province is a young province. We have 36 years as the average age of the population for the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. This is according to Statistics Canada. Saskatoon would be the youngest metropolitan area by average population in Canada, followed by Edmonton and then Calgary. Last year there were over 50,000 live births in this province according to the information from Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of students who are going to need a lot of classes and a lot of teachers at the front of those classes in the next few years across this province, particularly in Edmonton and particularly in Calgary. Whenever we look at this act, I hope we can have quite a discussion on it. But section 62, closure of schools: we have to have a good examination and debate on what is proposed here and how that will affect our communities and our constituencies for years to come.

Again, Mr. Speaker, a public school is part of the community. It's an investment in that community. When you look at some of

the education property taxes that are paid in neighborhoods, some neighborhoods are paying well in excess of a million dollars annually in their portion of the education property taxes on their houses, and they have no public school. They have come to our constituency office and pointed this out to me, and I agree with these taxpayers. Many of these taxpayers have children of public school age, and they do not think they have been treated fairly in this process. So when we discuss and we debate particularly section 62, let's make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that we can do to ensure that public education is not eroded and we go down the slope toward the American style of education system.

In conclusion, in another report I was reading, there was a school district in Florida where over 30 per cent of the students had no permanent home. The financial crisis had turned this particular neighbourhood upside down, and many students were in temporary shelters or living in campers or tents. The school system was the only stable thing in their lives.

We take a lot for granted in this province, but let's not take our public school system for granted. Let's make sure that this act is what we need not only now or next year but many years into the future. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, five additional minutes are available under 29(2)(a) for any questions or comments pertaining to the previous speaker. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Yes, please. You can ask a question.

Mr. Boutilier: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. Obviously, I look forward to speaking about this issue as well. It really is interesting. I know the hon. member is certainly well studied when it comes to the importance of education. Actually, as a former teacher myself I have to ask him: as we go forward, are there any other suggestions that you think could be added to this bill to improve it even more in helping young Alberta learners when it comes to the importance of education and the foundation that we build our society on?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. That's a very, very interesting question. Certainly, I would think that we have to have a stable funding formula for all public schools. I think that as we go forward we have to respect the historical traditions of this province and recognize the constitutional right for the separate school system. We cannot forget that. Specifically for Fort McMurray, we've got to make sure in fast-growing cities and communities, particularly in the north, that they're not ignored by this government.

I was astonished, hon. member, to hear from some residents of Fort McMurray that I know that they actually had to limit the number of family members that they invited to the high school graduation. Not all the brothers and sisters could go, the grandparents, the aunts and uncles. You had to be very selective with the invitations because it was a small facility. The graduating class was large. They even tried at one point, I was told, to go to a community hall. That wasn't big enough. That's an example of having, Mr. Speaker, the resources, the facilities where they are needed.

3:50

It puzzles me, particularly after I see the royalty projections that are going to come from bitumen production around the Fort McMurray area and there's going to be this potential billion dollar surplus – in fact, I think in two years it's projected to be \$5 billion

– that in a fast-growing city like Fort McMurray we don't have adequate education facilities for the students. If we want to permanently attract workers to cities such as Fort McMurray, we're going to have to make sure that there are public schools available for the younger family members of those workers.

Those are some of the concerns, hon. member, that I would like to see debated further with this Education Act, Bill 2. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I have Calgary-Mackay, followed by Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill 2, the Education Act, which was formally introduced in this House by the hon. Minister of Education. Before I begin, I would like to thank the Minister of Education and his predecessor, now the Minister of Human Services, for all their hard work on this proposed legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm truly impressed by these hon. members' dedication to a principled, learner-centred, and inclusive education system for all Alberta students. This is an absolutely fundamental piece of legislation before us. This legislation will govern all things within our K to 12 education system. Our government conducted extensive consultations with Albertans over the past three years driven by the government's desire and commitment to get it right with this bill, and I'm confident that this bill is getting it right.

The new legislation reflects the essence of the public interest in a strong education system and ensures that the rights, needs, and expectations of individuals and groups are in balance with the rights, needs, and expectations of society as a whole. The legislation recognizes that education is a shared responsibility of all partners in education, which occurs in an increasingly diverse range of learning environments and focuses on the concept of each student reaching their own potential.

There are a number of points, however, that I would like to touch on more closely with regard to how I see Bill 2 making a difference to students in Alberta in the pursuit of their aspirations and interests as well as in the nurturing of a passion for learning and a desire to be lifelong learners.

The first is my support for measures designed to improve the ever-critical issue of high school completion and making the transition from high school to postsecondary institutions as smoothly as possible by requiring school boards to collaborate with postsecondary institutions, high schools, and the community. To enable smooth transitions from high school to postsecondary, more students will be better supported in being exposed to and connected to postsecondary learning opportunities before graduation, and greater collaboration between high school and postsecondary may enable students to maximize their overall learning process.

One of these specific measures is raising the age of access to 21 years old, which broadens individual education opportunities by allowing more time and flexibility for completion of personal learning programs designed to meet personal needs.

Another policy shift found in Bill 2 is increasing the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17. These all signal that Albertans value high school completion and education in general. While we are making progress in increasing high school completion rates, I do believe more can be done. Mr. Speaker, in our fast-changing society it's no secret that those who complete high school have a much better chance of success in the workforce than those who do not, and today the value of a postsecondary education has never been greater.

The changes present in Bill 2 recognize the value of a high school education in preparing students for postsecondary education and informal education and are also strong signs that this bill fully supports high school completion and areas of postsecondary education.

Mr. Speaker, another key component of Bill 2 is the expansion of student responsibilities as part of the essential component of a positive learning environment and students' and boards' roles in developing that environment. Ultimately a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment must be available to all students in all schools. Students, parents, teachers, and communities continue to stress the importance of this. Many of us within this House and beyond are deeply disturbed and saddened when we hear senseless and tragic circumstances of students being bullied. In the most extreme circumstances, yet becoming increasingly more frequent, some students have taken their lives as a result of bullying. This simply must stop. We must respond to the issue of bullying. In this bill we are.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will provide direction to school boards to address both bullying and discrimination and identify them as important topics in addition to clearly establishing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. These provisions will increase the safety and security of students across the province and confirm the importance of a learning environment in nurturing a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self that all children and youth are entitled to.

The physical, social, and psychological harms of bullying are profound. It can cause alienation, mistrust, depression, anxiety, and lead to low self-esteem. No student should ever have to endure these effects, which are quite often caused by bullying. Ensuring that schools are welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments is absolutely crucial, and I applaud the measures taken by Bill 2 to address such a serious issue.

Mr. Speaker, for the reasons I've listed, I fully support Bill 2, the Education Act. We have an opportunity before us to build on Alberta's incredible foundation of excellence established by the dedicated teachers, school support staff, and trustees of our existing world-class education system. I have no doubt that the proposed Education Act will provide a provincial framework and expectations for educational excellence in Alberta.

Again I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Education for bringing this legislation forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

Bill 3 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012

The Deputy Chair: Are there any speakers to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Bill 3. We've talked about the supply requests here earlier, but again we can say that all this money is needed and is necessary. You know, we can go through the fact that every year there seems to be a supplementary supply bill. Some years there are two. Most years there's one. When you go through this, you see, of course, the Legislative Assembly requesting \$3.1 million for the Senate election. We had quite a chat about that and quite a discussion in

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. I know it's against the conventions of this House and whatnot to talk about that, but I was surprised at how quickly the government members, without much discussion – and I'm sure the Minister of Finance would have been very disappointed, if he had an opportunity, because it was quickly passed.

Mr. Liepert: It should have been.

4:00

Mr. MacDonald: And he says that it should have been.

Well, I would take exception to that because whenever you compare the money that was allocated in the past, in 2004, for a similar election, it was a lot less. It's cavalier attitudes like that that have resulted in five successive budget deficits, some of them bigger than others, but for a government that maintains itself or promotes itself as fiscally conservative, that's quite a record. That's a track record. When you look at that track record, you look at some of those deficits, and you look at what's been proposed now with this new way of doing business, maybe we would not need to have any more sup supply budgets. If we look at what's on the Order Paper – Bill 1, Bill 2, and now Bill 3 – maybe we would not need any more supplementary supply estimates if we had Bill 1 and a rigorous discipline over on that side of the House.

Now, hon. members across the way have talked about Slave Lake and the disastrous fire. Certainly, no one would argue that you do not need to have money set aside, whether it's for pine beetles or for drought or for fire. These are things that need to be done, but do we need to fund them through this process, or should we have a separate, dedicated fund that can be drawn down as needed? Which would be better for the taxpayers?

Now, when we look at health care and health care budgets, they just seem to grow and grow and grow. When we look at Bill 3, we see the allocations for Seniors; we see the allocations for Justice; Municipal Affairs; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Transportation; Human Services. We look at what was spent in health care, and we see that there was a surplus, a modest surplus. Others would say that it was about time. Others would say: well, much of the \$28 million for Justice is going to salary increases and pension contributions for judges in this province. We heard that earlier in question period today. That was one of the groups mentioned when the hospital support workers were not satisfied with 2 per cent and felt they should perhaps get 3 per cent, a modest request I would say, a very modest request, but for some reason or other it was deemed to be inappropriate or excessive.

When you look at the bill here, Bill 3, we are very generous with our esteemed judges. When we look at what's going on in Tourism, Parks and Recreation and we look at what's requested in Transportation, whenever you look at the big scheme of things, with a \$40 billion budget these are modest requests. But are they needed?

Now, getting back to this government's notion that they're going to have with Bill 1 a new way of doing business, a new way of doing budgets, it's sort of a shame that the current Finance minister wouldn't be part of the Treasury Board discussions because I certainly would like to be a fly on the wall there, he and the current Minister of Energy discussing what is needed and what is not needed in provincial expenditures. [interjection] It's interesting. The whip seems to think that everything is under control over there, so we'll have to accept his comment.

When you look at what is potentially to be saved in the fiscal plan for this year, Mr. Chairman, it is a lot less than what is

proposed and promoted with Bill 1. There were examples there – I could be wrong; please correct me if I am – of between 5 and 8 per cent where there would be efficiencies created. I did some rough calculations on this, and what is being proposed in in-house savings in the current budget is not even close to 1 per cent. So I'm going to do some more digging around and get some details on that.

I'm not certain that this current government will ever be able to manage this province's finances. I'm just not certain. With oil at a hundred dollars a barrel a lot of problems can be solved, but if oil was to go down in price, if the spread between west Texas intermediate and Brent North Sea crude was to get wider, then we could have some issues and some problems here.

Natural gas in America is another thing that we must follow with interest, and the production of shale gas. It's only six or seven years ago when 70 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue was coming from natural gas, and that has gone down significantly. It's not in single digits, but it's close. It's close. We have to be very, very careful. We have to realize the volatility of these price swings for natural gas, conventional crude oil, and bitumen and synthetic crude.

Now, one of the things that was suggested to me – and perhaps the Minister of Finance has already been thinking about this – is separating, and it should be separated, the amount that we collect in drilling rights for oil and gas leases and for licences in the north to mine bitumen. Perhaps we should set that aside. It fluctuates, recently \$700 million to \$900 million. It has spiked up, and it's anticipated that at the end of March it will be well over \$3.4 billion this year, so it's a sizable amount of money. There are those that suggest that it should be invested, that it should be saved, and I certainly would agree with them.

This budget is just like Bill 3, Mr. Chairman. It's all about spending money. It has nothing to do about saving money for future generations. It's all about spending; it's not about saving. What this government, this Progressive Conservative Party does best is spend money. Does it spend it wisely? I would have to say no.

In fact, in the time that I have left – I'm really glad they're not on here: Horse Racing Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, \$26 million.

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, \$26 million. My math: over 10 years they have received over \$392 million in grants. These are grants. In the public accounts you can look at them. They're grants. They are classified as grants in the public accounts, so I'm going to accept them as grants.

As far as gaming revenue, the horse-racing industry is producing, I think, 2 per cent of total revenue. It used to be over 20 per cent. I don't think anybody subsidized buggy whips when they were in production. It was the market. The people decided whether they wanted them or not. The same thing applies with horse racing, you know, those blue and orange silks that are on these horses. I think the public is telling you something. They're not interested. They've moved on to other forms of entertainment, yet we persist. I would use this as an example of a government that loves to spend but has a hard job saving.

What could we use that \$392 million for? I can think of a lot of things that we could use that money for. We could use it for a school lunch program, not only for five or six schools in central Edmonton but schools across the province. How far on an annual basis would \$26 million go with a school lunch program? The

hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has probably got that right at the top of his head or on the tip of his tongue.

Dr. Taft: It would eliminate school hunger.

Mr. MacDonald: It would eliminate school hunger. I'm confident that the hon. member is right.

For \$392 million how many long-term care beds could have been constructed over the last decade or at least created spaces where doctors, if needed, could transfer patients from the hospital to a long-term care facility, a public facility? That would be another example.

Four hundred million dollars would come in really handy for libraries. Four hundred million dollars would come in really well in Fort McMurray. Fort McMurray is the economic engine for the entire province and for a lot of places in the rest of Canada, but it lacks basic infrastructure needs. I'm told that there are still rush hour problems in Fort McMurray in the morning and in the evening that would rival both Chicago and New York. [interjection] This hon. member knows his community very, very well. In fact, that \$392 million: a wee bit of that would have satisfied the need for a long-term care facility in Fort McMurray.

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. And we're talking about elections. Mr. Chairman, it'll be interesting to see what happens in Calgary-West. I understand – and this is completely off the topic; I know that – there is going to be a hat with three names in it, and the Premier is going to draw one name out of the hat, and that person is going to carry the blue and orange colours.

Mr. Liepert: We'll see. We'll see.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, just to remind you that relevance is a long revered tradition in this House. Relevance.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. You're absolutely right, and I stand corrected. Those hon. gentlemen across the way have been distracting me. I apologize.

Now, Mr. Hughes. If Mr. Hughes was the name of a horse and this horse was subsidized by an initiative from Horse Racing Alberta and the owner was an elite, glitterati Conservative . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I am compelled to now put the following question forward: does the committee approve Bill 3, that being the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012?

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: The committee is now compelled to immediately rise and report.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Concurrence has been given.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 2
Education Act
(continued)

[Adjourned debate February 16: Ms Woo-Paw]

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to speak to Bill 2, the Education Act, because truly it is the foundation of our province when it comes to the importance of educating our young people. I also say that as an educator, someone who has taught in the high school system as well as in the university system, but probably even more importantly speaking today to this bill as a father of a young son who is just four and will be going to kindergarten next year.

The importance of this bill. I want to say that in reading the bill, there are many things in the bill that I actually like in terms of not only thinking for the future – that is important, and it's something that I have not often seen from this government, certainly in other ministries like Finance and places like that, certainly in Health. But I do say that I commend the authors of this bill because I think it is important, and I say that first as a father of a youngster who will be going to kindergarten next year.

Now, I also would like to touch base on the importance of a Wildrose position on important initiatives because I believe that, as you know, Mr. Speaker, there's apparently going to be a provincial election within the next couple of weeks or the next month or so. I want to talk about our next generation. In terms of our next generation, as most teachers and parents well know, the traditional classroom model of teachers lecturing students of the same age is dated. This system often results in gifted students who have potential restricted by peers who may not learn as quickly while at the same time it has to be an inclusive system.

I do believe that, fortunately, emerging technologies in teaching methods – I certainly applaud the teachers within all of our schools across Alberta and specifically, of course, our teachers in Fort McMurray for the excellent work that they do in educating our youth. I'm very proud to say as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the oil sands capital of the world, and also as its former mayor and city councillor that it's so important that all of us and our communities contribute.

Now, I find this interesting, though, that in a city of over 110,000 the former minister of health thought that someone that's 103 years old could wait till she's 108 years old, five more years, when he cancelled the long-term care facility. That was really unfortunate. In fact, I will say that I'm sad to report to this House that I was asked by the family to be a pallbearer at her funeral as she just had passed away recently, having, of course, lived a very good life of over 103 years, but she died in a hospital in an acute-care bed.

4:20

Of course, the things that I was fighting for with the then minister of health two years ago from the gibberish he was providing me was truly to say: let's honour our seniors; let's honour the people that built this province. I am saddened that I was not able to at that point provide this senior with the long-term care that many other Albertans do enjoy. Of course, there are many communities that still do not have a long-term care facility, and I'm saddened by the fact that our city of over a hundred thousand . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I wonder if I could just remind you and other members that we're actually debating Bill 2, the Education Act. If you could please relate your speech to that. Just as a reminder.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. I'm so glad because I will now bridge it back to the future of our youth and the importance of the wisdom we learn from our seniors because that is life-long learning, learning with our seniors. Of course, I actually think our seniors in long-term care can even be enhanced teachers of building on that. To anyone in here who's laughing because of the fact that Fort McMurray doesn't have a long-term care centre, I can tell you that that's an enhancement to the education of our youth, which is so important.

I would like to turn for a moment, though, Mr. Speaker, to something that is equally important, and that's children in our system who require special-needs support. The Wildrose on the Education Act believes that thousands of Alberta parents have children with special learning needs, and we believe as the Wildrose that it's absolutely critical that we ensure that these students and their parents are provided with the necessary funding to address these challenges as early as possible in a child's development. Failure to do so can really have catastrophic consequences for the child and the child's family and perhaps could result in even more massive costs to the Alberta taxpayer down the road.

That's why a Wildrose government takes the approach of not only being down the road, as I indicated earlier, on some of the things in this Education Act, but we want to be around the corner in terms of visioning for the future. Being around the corner, I know, is something that the Minister of Finance will never understand, but I will say that I am very pleased by the fact that so many people in here share my view of being not only down the road when it comes to education but also around the corner. That is futuristic. That is visionary. That's clearly something that we in the Wildrose believe is so important.

Often special-needs funding is difficult to assess, I think, with parents and teachers having a very limited say in how it's best utilized. In fact, in most cases parents will want to work with their child's school to include their student in a regular classroom when proper support is provided. Inclusive education: that's a term that I think perhaps members of this Assembly are not aware of. Not everyone; some are. But inclusive education is so important. It means that youngsters who have special needs are not put out in a portable at the end of the school, like 20 years ago. That is very important.

I will say that some parents may choose a different option, and this choice should be respected as well. Parents should be respected in the choices they make for their children. Each special-needs student is unique and should in partnership with parents and with our schools be considered and supported accordingly.

I want to be able to say here today that, you know, as we go forward, I believe that it's so important that we have new, emerging technologies. Something that in my community I'm very proud of, in fact, not only from an educational perspective but from the impact it rolls over on industry, is the technology of 30 years that has been grown in Fort McMurray in oil sands development, something that the Minister of Finance will benefit from in the future by the bitumen royalty, that will help continue to fund our education systems.

It's important, though, with that bitumen helping education that you continue to pay the goose that is laying the golden eggs. I do believe that from the goose in this situation, as indicated in the budget, came of course the golden eggs of the bitumen and what is

coming out of my community of Fort McMurray. I can say that the examples I've used from an education perspective as well as the wisdom of seniors, who have built this province in teaching not only your children but, actually, teaching other middle-aged and older people, is the wisdom that we want to continue to respect and something that the Wildrose will always respect.

Mr. Speaker, I believe and I know that those who are teachers in this Assembly, the Speaker himself, are very familiar with the importance of education as a building block of our society. That is so important. It's unfortunate that some members, not all – in fact, most of the members on the front bench I see are nodding in agreement. There's usually just one who is not, who's got his back turned to me. What a surprise in that. He clearly does not understand the value of education, but he's keen as the Minister of Finance to take the bitumen that will be the dollars that are necessary to be able to fund future educational projects. That in itself is something that is so important.

Certainly, I will say that there are some people I will miss, and there are others that I will never miss. I will not go into any other detail on that, Mr. Speaker, because we're talking about education, and education is something that is so important. Clearly, I can say that the more we grow our brain from the wisdom of seniors, the wisdom of our teachers, and the wisdom of our neighbours, it is so important as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are some things in this act that they are getting right, and the Wildrose has always said: we want to get it right, not the second time or the third time but the first time. I'm very proud of a Wildrose government, that would strengthen our K to 12 education system by implementing a variety of reforms that will enhance our Education Act, empowering individual public schools and Catholic schools and charter schools by implementing funding models that send per-student operational and maintenance funding directly to the school each student attends. Individual schools will then be able to determine how they allocate those resources most appropriately; for instance, having more teachers and new equipment to help our students and dealing with special needs so that there is the adequate support to go with students so they are included in our education system.

I also would like to say that the Wildrose on the education front wants to establish multiple pilot projects across the province where open enrolment in tuition-free public, Catholic, and public charter schools are permitted to opt into a competency-based learning and assessment education model. This is something that, clearly, is not just down the road; it's around the corner. We believe in that, and you'll be hearing more about that. We also believe that we want to reform and grant public, Catholic, and public charter schools more flexibility to offer specialized curriculum tracks in the trades, arts, music, physical education, and business.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that protecting a parent's right to choose what school their child attends is so important in public and Catholic as well as public charter, private, or home-schooling. We want to continue to ensure that the current Alberta education practice of permitting a fixed percentage of regular per-pupil funding to directly follow a student continues. It is so important. Again, that is a choice that should be determined by the parent as to where they believe it will help the students of Alberta. That is important.

Most importantly, to conclude, Mr. Speaker, as a teacher and someone who has taught with my wife at a college and at a university, we want to continue to work with our teachers. Truly, a teacher is one who is well qualified with the educational professionals to continue to replace the dated and inadequate provincial achievement tests with a new standardized assessment model. We the Wildrose believe that this is, again, being futuristic.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for listening this afternoon.

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

Hon. members of the House, I want to wish all of you a very happy Family Day weekend.

Noting Standing Order 4(2), I now declare the House adjourned until Tuesday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Tuesday, February 21, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 5th Session (2012)

Activity to February 16, 2012

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

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

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

1 Results-based Budgeting Act (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 7 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 31-38 (Feb. 8 aft.), 125-34 (Feb. 13 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 124-34 (Feb. 14 aft.), 160-61 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 164-65 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

2 Education Act (Lukaszuk)

First Reading -- 115 (Feb. 14 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 152-59 (Feb. 15 aft.), 187-88 (Feb. 16 aft.), 182-85 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)

3 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 115 (Feb. 14 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 150-52 (Feb. 15 aft.), 161 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 185-86 (Feb. 16 aft., passed)

201 Alberta Bill of Rights (Property Rights Protection) Amendment Act, 2012 (Hinman)

First Reading -- 69 (Feb. 13 aft., passed)

203 Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012 (Sherman)

First Reading -- 69 (Feb. 13 aft., passed)

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