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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 67 Alberta Liberal: 8 Wildrose: 4 New Democrat: 2 Alberta: 1 Independent: 1

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MacDonald
Quest
Taft

Standing Committee on Community Development

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Boutilier
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Drysdale	Sarich
Evans	Snelgrove
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Rogers
Swann
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 8, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statements by the Speaker

40th Anniversary of *Alberta Hansard* and Broadcasting

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Clerk gets us into the Routine, I would like to make mention of a number of historic events.

First of all, 40 years ago today, on March 8, 1972, a motion was put forward as Government Motion 1, which read in part:

There shall be a printed record of the deliberations and proceedings of the sittings of the Assembly to be known as the “Alberta Hansard” which shall be compiled, edited, printed, distributed and administered under the direction and authority of the Speaker, in accordance with this rule.

Today, 40 years later, our *Hansard* has continued to produce transcripts for this House for 3,650 House meetings and 1,975 standing and select special committee meetings. To commemorate this special occasion, a special cover will be produced for today’s *Hansard*.

The second thing that occurred 40 years ago was unique, in essence, in that it provided for broadcasting of the meetings of this Assembly. Alberta became the first jurisdiction in Canada to broadcast their proceedings. The motion was introduced by Mr. Lou Hyndman, who was then the minister of education, and it was seconded by the hon. Don Getty, minister of federal and intergovernmental affairs, who at the time stated:

At a time in our history when Albertans can marvel at the view from the moon in their own living rooms, it is absurd that they are not able to watch their own Legislative Assembly.

So a bit of history with respect to that.

Member Anniversaries

The Speaker: On March 11, a few days from now, eight members of this Assembly will celebrate their 15th anniversary of service as an elected member of this Assembly. March 11, 2012, will mark 5,479 days of service for these eight individuals, and each of them has distinguished themselves in this Assembly over the years. I’m going to mention their names, and I’m going to have a page deliver a special 15-year Mace pin to each of them: first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who was elected 15 years ago to represent the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud and remains as the representative for the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud; the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, who was elected 15 years ago to represent the constituency of Sherwood Park and remains the representative of this constituency that bears the same name; the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, who was elected 15 years ago to represent the constituency of Calgary-Fort and remains today as the representative for the constituency of Calgary-Fort; the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, who, once

again, 15 years ago was elected to represent the constituency of Banff-Cochrane, a constituency that bears that same name today; the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – again, the constituency name has not changed in 15 years, and 15 years later we welcome and congratulate him today – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, again the same constituency name for 15 years. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was elected 15 years ago as well, as was the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, but 15 years ago the constituency name was Fort McMurray.

Would you join me in congratulating all these members.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two visitors from the country of Lebanon, Dr. Assem Araji, Member of Parliament representing the Bekaa Valley, and Mr. Khaled al-Daher, representing the province of Akkar in northern Lebanon. The two hon. MPs are members of the largest political party of Lebanon, headed by the former Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Saad Hariri.

Mr. Speaker, the Lebanese community in Alberta has a very proud and long history in this province. As a matter of fact, the first Lebanese arrived in Alberta around 1860. Today I am proud to say that almost 42,000 Canadians of Lebanese descent proudly call Alberta home.

Accompanying our visitors are their administrative assistants and tour organizers: Mr. Omar Kaddah, Mr. Ibrahim Taliani, and Mr. Akl Kharib. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure today to make an introduction on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. We have 10 students and three adults with us from Alder Flats elementary school. They’re in the members’ gallery. They’re participating in School at the Legislature this week, and the first half of their group was actually here yesterday and was introduced by the hon. member. I am pleased to introduce these guests, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a distinct and great pleasure of mine today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 20 special people. They are interns with the municipal internship program who have almost completed the program. The program has provided them with an opportunity to gain real-life experience within municipal government, supporting our province’s towns, villages, counties, and cities. They will join more than 150 interns who have completed the program since 2002. This Municipal Affairs initiative ensures continued strength and success of our municipalities with employees who are trained and skilled professionals. These 20 people will be fundamental to building better communities going forward. They are joined by three exceptional Municipal Affairs staff: the manager of internships,

Wendy Peters, and internship advisors Melanie Wood and Valerie Hope. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students from Strathcona Christian Academy in my constituency. They are accompanied by teachers Jaime Peters, Alison Amos, and Ann Elzinga and parent helpers Kevin Wiens, James Vanderland, Shannon Stewart, Dan Tchir, Helena Myschuk, Judie Swinton, Maureen Kaczynski, Denise Wigmore, Pam Cholak, Patricia Stoddard, Jim Drew, Wanda Benterud, Donna Dziwenka, and Cathy Douglas. They are seated in the public and members' galleries because it's such a large group.

I'd also like to mention a couple of the students. Alyssa Stoddard and Alexis Myschuk are members of the Strathcona Basketball Association bantam Stingers, who just won a silver medal the other day, so congratulations to you. Again, they are seated in the public and members' galleries. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege for me today to introduce two extremely impressive Albertans that I'm very proud to call my friends. Debbie Bosomworth was born and raised in the Lassiter-Rycroft area but has been proud to call Calgary home for the past 25 years. Her love of travel and meeting new people and entertaining has proven to her how fortunate we all are to be living in this wonderful province. She doesn't mind our snow, but she loves our summers, when she gets back to her farming roots in her garden. Debbie is a tireless worker. She has served as the treasurer for the Calgary-Lougheed PC Association for over a dozen years.

1:40

Jeanne Carter grew up in Calgary. She's lived in Canyon Meadows for over 20 years and been a member of the Calgary-Lougheed PC Association for over 25 years. She was encouraged to join our PC association by her daughter Nadine, who was the president of PCYA. She has served as our membership chair and is involved in provincial elections and obviously enjoys yoga and working out.

Mr. Speaker, Debbie and Jeanne have both climbed medical mountains in their lives. I would ask all hon. members to honour them with the warm welcome of our Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the privilege of serving breakfast, making pancakes for social workers working for the Department of Human Services in the north part of Edmonton. Today we have with us in recognition of National Social Work Week a number of registered social workers from the ministry.

Social workers play a vital role in Alberta communities. Their contribution to the health and well-being of our citizens deserves to be recognized not just during this special week but all year long. These particular staff work in some of the most challenging jobs in the field, supporting families so they can stay together or raise their child with a disability, helping to reunite families after they've addressed concerns related to the children's safety and well-being, and when needed finding loving families for children who've come into care.

Mr. Speaker, we have with us today Gail Appelgren, a child intervention supervisor in Edmonton; Leigh Chisholm, a child intervention caseworker from Rocky Mountain House; Laurie Lancaster, a family support for children with disabilities supervisor in Killam; Luisa Loria, a supervisor in the youth services unit in Red Deer; and Lisa Winsor, a child intervention caseworker in Edmonton. I'd like to ask them to rise and through them receive thanks from all of us to all social workers in Alberta, who do such great work for our children and families.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, a second introduction on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'd like to introduce to all members of the Assembly five members of the Kidney Foundation of Canada, northern Alberta and territories branch, from here in Edmonton. They're here with us today to hear a member's statement from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for World Kidney Day, which is today, March 8. Heidi Erisman, Flavia Robles, Don Charnaw, Tammy Fifield, and Sheelah Zapf, could you please rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly several social workers. Shamanthi Cooray and Heather Sweet are both social workers with the Ministry of Human Services, and both are active members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Lori Sigurdson is a faculty member at MacEwan University, vice-president of Public Interest Alberta, and the professional affairs co-ordinator for the Alberta College of Social Workers. She is also the NDP candidate in Edmonton-Riverview. With them is Erica Bullwinkle, who is Lori's campaign manager for the upcoming election. I would now ask my guests to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

International Women's Day

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and recognize International Women's Day. Today provides us with an important opportunity to reflect on women's progress in various fields and industries and all aspects of society. This year's national theme is Strong Women, Strong Canada – Women in Rural, Remote and Northern Communities: Key to Canada's Economic Prosperity.

The Alberta government applauds the important contributions of women in both our rural and urban communities to all areas of society, including the economy. We also recognize aboriginal women, who constitute a vibrant and highly diverse segment of Alberta's population.

Mr. Speaker, the province has a number of initiatives that support the progress of women. For example, we recently announced a \$17 million increase to the child care subsidy program, which will support a 42 per cent increase in income thresholds for those eligible for maximum child care subsidies. This increase strengthens our support for the participation of women in the workforce and their ability to access quality, affordable child care.

I'm pleased that our government also provides the Persons Case scholarships, which are awarded every year in honour of the Famous Five, the pioneering Albertans who fought for women to be deemed as persons under Canadian law. These scholarships award a total of \$100,000 to several students whose studies and career goals contribute to the advancement of women or to those who are studying in fields that are not traditional to their gender.

The advancement of women is evident in Canada with more women continuing to enrol in postsecondary programs after completing high school. A greater percentage of women are also leaving these programs with a completed diploma or degree.

Mr. Speaker, women have come a long way in Alberta, and it is important that we continue to recognize their vital contributions to our province. We know that in order to have a strong Canada and a strong Alberta, we must continue to celebrate and support strong women.

Thank you.

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

Women's Equality

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1977 the world has used this day to focus attention on the lives of women. So let's pay a little attention today.

For women in Alberta the wage gap shows women earning only 68 cents for every dollar a man earns. This is the very bottom in Canada, and it compares shamefully to Canada overall, where women earn 78 cents to the dollar of men's earnings. Women who graduate from postsecondary education here in Alberta have even more discrimination to look forward to. These women earn only 63 per cent of what men with the same education earn, and as women get older, the national average is that the wage gap diminishes so that women earn 80 cents on the male dollar, except in Alberta. Here older women only earn 67 cents for each dollar earned by a man.

When International Women's Day began, women were earning 62 cents for every dollar of male earnings. No other province in this country has made so little progress in 35 years. These startling statistics in 2012 must be considered by thinking of the human lives involved. Girls are growing up today facing an economic injustice that will hurt their achievement over their lives, and poverty among women means poverty among children.

We need to ask ourselves tough questions about why this government has not addressed the issue properly. Answers are near at hand. Alberta is the only province with no minister responsible for the status of women and no advisory council. Alberta is one of three provincial holdouts for a child benefit, a simple measure that addresses child poverty, which is more prevalent in single families led by women.

These things do not change by some matter or some chance of evolution. Government needs to say that this matters, that this is unacceptable. Government needs to develop long-term, sustainable plans to change the situation and then keep that promise.

In this House we need to pay attention to the limited number of women in politics. I'm very proud to say that nearly half the people seeking election with the NDP in this spring's election are women. Overall, however, it takes more than inspirational seminars to see women being elected to public office or achieving equality in the workplace. It takes commitment, accountability, and work . . .

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

REDress Project for Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on International Women's Day I am wearing a pretty red party dress. I believe I look pretty. That's how I'm sure many aboriginal women felt as they went on their last date.

This red dress I am honoured to wear is about all the forgotten aboriginal women who've gone missing in our country. In Canada young aboriginal women are five times more likely than other women to have their lives ended by violent means. Across the country there are 600 cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women, half of which have not been solved. This is heartbreaking and unacceptable. These women are valuable members of our communities and deserve respect and protection. These women are daughters, sisters, nieces, aunts, and mothers. They have families and friends who miss them dearly.

This is the reason that the incredible Métis artist Jaime Black started the REDress Project. Ms Black has been collecting and displaying red dresses to symbolize women of the red nation, their lifeblood, which has been shed all too often, and women's ability to give life. Since 2010 she has collected and displayed hundreds of dresses, and now the project is catching on. Just this week students at the U of A collected and displayed over a hundred red dresses across campus to raise awareness about this important issue. This show of solidarity with our sisters not only warms my heart, but it gives me great hope that the future will be brighter for aboriginal women in Canada.

In the spirit of International Women's Day I will say that we must stand up for women not only internationally but right here at home. Our stolen sisters deserve to be found and their spirits laid to rest, knowing that our governments and our communities will do whatever it takes to honour and protect our aboriginal sisters.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Budget Advertisement

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In yet another clear example of how this government continues to bully and intimidate anyone who questions them, the Minister of Finance showed his disdain for accountability by braying about how the government won't respond to any more questions until I apologize. But I'm not going to be quiet, and I'm not going to apologize for standing up to this government on behalf of Albertans who deserve answers. To the Minister of Finance. Minister, let's try to stick to your ministry this time and answer the question. How much more taxpayer money does this minister plan to waste on pre-election ads, tours, and other schemes just to buy votes?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, about a year and a half ago this hon. member stood in his place in this Assembly and made some allegations that proved to be unfounded. The government moved forward in the way it should to investigate those allegations. They found that there was no foundation to them. I want this member to tell this Assembly: how much did it cost Alberta taxpayers to check into the unfounded allegations that this member left on the floor of this House and has not yet apologized for?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, we have young children here. The minister needs to teach them to exercise the art of listening. The question, Minister, was to your ministry.

The question again to this minister, whose rude and offensive behaviour to Albertans clearly reflects this government's warped values: how can your government justify wasting 425,000 taxpayer dollars on PC ads, trying to peddle your fudge-it budget?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's important that Albertans know what's in the budget. We've got an election coming up, as the

member rightly admits to. We have to ensure that our messages are communicated, whether there's an election or there isn't an election.

But I come back to it, Mr. Speaker. He's talking about taxpayer dollars. I'm asking him whether he's going to apologize to this Assembly for the taxpayers of this province sending the Alberta Health Quality Council on a wild goose chase based on unfounded allegations.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I will not apologize for something that led to evidence that this government has broken the health care system and caused intimidation of doctors.

Given that that question led to the truth coming out, Minister, and given that the AMA has taken out a full-page newspaper ad to tell the truth about this government's record of intimidation and bullying and this minister's record, how much taxpayer money is the Ministry of Finance, you, planning to spend on a PR campaign trying to make these doctors go away, the champions for Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear and open about what our advertising campaign cost. This member has not been clear and open about the allegations that he laid on this floor, and I'm asking him to apologize to this Assembly, apologize to the taxpayers of Alberta for sending the Health Quality Council on a wild goose chase on allegations that were not founded.

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

Judicial Inquiry into Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2010 the Leader of the Official Opposition received an e-mail from Dr. Mark Joffe, the president of the Capital health region at the time. In his e-mail he conveyed the support of himself and Dr. Tim Winton, another physician, who "knows what it is like to [be] isolated, marginalized and challenged, even [when] you are right." To the Premier: will you now expand the terms of reference for the public inquiry to allow Drs. Joffe and Winton and other bullied health workers to tell their story?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've answered this question a number of times in this House. The Health Quality Council did their analysis of the intimidation allegations, as the Minister of Finance has noted, the unfounded allegations that were made. The Health Quality Council has actually said in their report that no public inquiry into doctor intimidation was required. The resources that the hon. member is asking us about in terms of media, the resources that would be used up and that should be used to build the task force around advocacy, that doctors want to do . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does this government dismiss the calls of the Alberta Medical Association, the Health Sciences Association, approximately one-third of the health staff in this province represented here, all of whom want a comprehensive inquiry into this health care system and intimidation and misconduct?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the Health Quality Council has asked in their recommendations – part B, 7 to 9, I think, are the recommendation numbers – that a task force should be created to clearly delineate what is advocacy for a

patient, what is advocacy on behalf of another doctor, what is the advocacy in the College of Family Physicians, what is the advocacy of the AMA? The AMA is in a bargaining position right now. We understand that. That's partly what's going on here as well. But we're going to go ahead with those recommendations. We've said yes.

Dr. Swann: Is this Premier trying to protect current and past ministers of health, the former board chair and CEO of Capital health, the chair of the Health Quality Council, the college registrar, or all of the above?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been very clear that there is going to be a judge-led inquiry into the allegations that were levied in the past by these hon. members about queue-jumping. If there was intimidation that was related to queue-jumping, as the hon. members have suggested there was, this inquiry has the ability and the terms of reference to dig into that on behalf of all Albertans. The Premier made a commitment; she's following through on that commitment.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three months ago in this Assembly we passed Bill 24, the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, legislation that allows the conduct of health system inquiries by panels empowered to compel evidence even from parties with nondisclosure agreements. Back to the Deputy Premier. Has the Premier broken her promise and narrowed the terms of reference of the recently called health system inquiry so that doctors McNamee and Winton, who were bullied into nondisclosure agreements, will never be called as witnesses?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference are very clear, what the Premier has said is very clear, what her promise was is very clear about the allegations, again, made by the hon. members across the way here about queue-jumping and if there was intimidation around that queue-jumping. That promise was made; that promise has been kept.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will this government finally have the courage to commit today to comprehensive terms of reference that would require prominent government members, former ministers, the former board chair and CEO of the Capital health region, the chair of the Health Quality Council, the registrar of the college of physicians to disclose this government's widespread practice of bullying and intimidation in the health system?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the inquiry is going to have the ability to look at any evidence related to queue-jumping. If doctor intimidation or political interference is identified, then it will be looked at. The promise was made; the promise was kept.

Dr. Swann: We know, Mr. Speaker, why there's not going to be this kind of quality of account with this kind of public inquiry. This government are cowards.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. You call for an inquiry, we do the inquiry, you don't like the answer, so we become the cowards. I would call them hypocrites.

Alberta First Nations Energy Centre

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, we're dealing with another case of cover-up and backroom deals that smell of corruption, and the

only way out of this for the government is to table their own reports and be open and honest. This government recently withdrew support of the Alberta First Nations Energy Centre, a \$6.6 billion refinery project here in Alberta. The Minister of Energy claims it's not economical, while the minister of aboriginal affairs tells the treaty chiefs they did not get a good enough deal for the people. Madam Premier, which of these phony excuses are you going to stand by?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll let the Minister of Energy respond as well, but I believe that the hon. member might want to get his facts straight. Perhaps the Minister of Energy might want to clarify that for him.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Table them – and we'd be thrilled – your behind-the-room deals.

Given that Engineers India Limited have completed an exhaustive 1,200-page, \$15 million plus report that is also supported by Senator St. Germain, the China National Technical Import & Export Corporation, PricewaterhouseCoopers and even your own ADM of Energy's briefing report supported the project, would the Premier please be honest with AFNEC and all Albertans and explain the political meddling, and who is the chosen company that you're tossing AFNEC aside for?

2:00

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear the members of the third or fourth party suddenly encouraging government involvement in upgrading. It turns out that the project they're referring to is modelled directly after the North West upgrader, the one they were denouncing so strongly before Christmas.

I would simply say that there are billions of dollars at risk here, and the program that was being proposed had not reached the point of development in terms of engineering, financial support, and so forth where the benefits outweighed the risks.

Mr. Hinman: That's a poor excuse. The fact is that they're guaranteeing feedstock price, which isn't what we're talking about. We're talking about the BRIK program.

Given the track record of broken promises, including a judicial inquiry into doctor intimidation, critical power lines, fixed election dates, to name a few, and given this government continues to break deals and fails to deal in good faith with the people and businesses of Alberta, how are we going to attract investment to Alberta when this Premier and this government keep breaking their word? You need to return to the table with AFNEC.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think money talks louder than the words from this man over here. Investments in the oil sands in the past year: \$19 billion. Land sales for the year that we're just finishing: 3 and a half billion dollars. Investment confidence has never ever been higher in Alberta than it is today. They better pay attention to the facts. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I know there's a sunburst out there, and I know there's a full moon, but let's remember where we are.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Drilling Stimulus Program

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2009 this government instituted a drilling incentive program that went over budget by 60 per cent and ended up costing taxpayers \$2.9 billion. In the meantime the industry lost over 10,000 jobs. This was the

biggest corporate welfare program in years. To the Minister of Energy: who is accountable for a drilling incentive program that had exceeded its budget by a billion and a half dollars while doing nothing to increase employment in the oil and gas sector?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd remind the hon. leader of the fourth party that this wasn't just a drilling stimulus program; it was a job stimulus program as well. Did it spend more than we anticipated? Yes. But it created more jobs than we anticipated, 75 direct jobs, 60 indirect jobs for every well drilling every day for every Alberta family.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, the minister should know that Stats Canada data shows a loss of 10,000 jobs in the oil and gas sector during this program's existence.

Given that the far-too-cozy relationship between the Tories and the oil and gas industry is well known, it's no surprise that this program contained loopholes allowing companies to trade drilling royalty credits in an extra-legal market, allowing them to receive taxpayer cash they didn't deserve. Will the minister take action to recover those funds that some companies received by exploiting loopholes in your program?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, let's go to StatsCan and remind the hon. leader of the fourth party that unemployment went over 7 per cent – over 7 per cent – that year. The price of energy in 2008 dropped from \$147 a barrel to \$34 a barrel. Wells stopped drilling. I know this may come as a shock, but when wells aren't drilled, there are no jobs and there are no royalties.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, they gave \$3 billion away, and it cost 10,000 jobs.

Given that the drilling incentive plan went way over budget and given that the government knew about it at the time, will the minister admit that while the Tory government imposes tough fiscal discipline on seniors and special-needs children, it recklessly pours billions of dollars into corporate welfare for its friends in the oil patch?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't quite understand what he doesn't understand. No drilling means no royalties and no jobs – no jobs – so we're not going to apologize for creating jobs during a period when unemployment in Alberta went over 7 per cent.

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

Logging in the Bragg Creek Area

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office has been flooded in recent weeks with calls and e-mails from concerned citizens who are expressing their deep distress at the proposed logging in west Bragg Creek. The minister wrote me on February 15 that the proposed harvest blocks are all about fire containment, but on February 23 he told U of C professor Dr. Ralph Carter, in front of witnesses, that logging is about ensuring that the government's contractual commitments to logging companies are honoured and that the other arguments, including fire risk, are of minor importance. To the minister: which is it?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I can assure the hon. member that I said no such thing, Mr. Speaker. What I will tell him is that there is an allocation of timber that is allocated to Spray Lake Sawmills, that employs people, Alberta families. It sustains Alberta communities.

In addition to that, the harvest design on that landscape is there partially to protect the community of Bragg Creek from a fire, and

the county and the regional fire department agree with the design there. They were consulted.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, since section 26 of the Forests Act gives the minister the unfettered right to “alter or vary any provision, condition or area” of a timber quota or even outright cancel the quota, licence, or permit in the public interest, will the minister commit to denying approval of this logging proposal in instructing Spray Lake Sawmills to log elsewhere in their forest agreement planning area this summer?

Mr. Oberle: I most certainly will not, Mr. Speaker. This is a well-planned harvest activity. It’s been vetted through our department. It’s been vetted in public consultation. It’s a good thing for the community, it’s a good thing for fire protection, and I will not cancel it.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, he must be talking to different people than I am – that seems to usually be the case with this government – because I’m hearing that the residents of Bragg Creek are feeling monumentally unconsulted, that it has been monumentally unsatisfactory consultation. The logging is proposed to happen this summer. Although SRD and the minister have not yet given final approval, I have to wonder on the strength of his answers: is the fix in?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise to me that that member is talking to different people than I am, but I’ve got to tell you that there has been public consultation on management plans. There is public consultation on general development plans and public consultation on annual operating plans. The company itself has been out there. It’s actually a requirement of their harvesting that they hold public meetings. We’ve been monitoring it, and in fact they have been holding public meetings, and they’ll continue to hold more. They work with stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

School Fees

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. Critics are claiming that the education system is underfunded and that schools have to rely on fees to provide basic busing and instructional material for students. Why are parents in Alberta paying even more than their tax dollars to ensure that their son or daughter can successfully complete public school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have just a few days ago defended the estimates, the budget, for Alberta Education. As you know, this government has made a commitment for the first time in the history of the province to present a three-year budget, that will be increasing from \$6.8 billion to \$7.1 billion. We’re spending roughly \$36 million per school day on education. However, I will be undertaking a review of all school fees charged by jurisdictions to see if any of them can be rationalized and if there are any charges that are perhaps outside of the scope of what should be charged.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My next question is to the same minister. When will you require all public schools to operate

within the allotted budget and ban public school fees once and for all?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, school boards do operate within the public funding scope. However, often school boards make decisions to deliver to students additional programs or additional services that are outside of the scope of public education, or often parents make choices to perhaps have a child attend a specialized program that is not in their community school. That may be a reason for some of the fees. But we will have the fees reviewed. Parents should not be charged for anything that is funded under the auspices of public education.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. The final question to the same minister: with school boards and schools able to decide for themselves what fees for service they may charge, how is a parent to know what is a legitimate, required expense and what may be questionable or, for that matter, who to turn to when in doubt?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, a school board’s autonomy is very important because the role of locally elected trustees is to make decisions reflective of community needs. Having said that, I will be publishing and I have already started publishing detailed budget information not only from the government of Alberta for the Ministry of Education but for all the school boards so that parents will be able to make decisions based on factual information, to see how much money is spent in each school board and how school boards allocate dollars within their system.

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

2:10

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year private schools will receive \$190 million in public funding. The Minister of Education has created a website where Alberta taxpayers can hold our public school boards accountable for their expenditures to ensure openness and transparency. Having checked the website, I was distressed that no information about private school spending was on the website. To the Minister of Education: why is this information not available regarding private schools and how they are using public dollars?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, information about all schools will be publicized soon. However, I have to tell you this. Parents of children who go to private schools also pay property taxes, which in part pay for public education. Those schools receive only 70 per cent of public funding. They don’t receive any additional envelope funding for transportation. Private schools build their own buildings, which are often in excess of 20-some million dollars. At the end of the day Albertans have choice. The most important aspect of Alberta education is parental control and parental choice, and they will continue to have choice.

Mr. Hehr: Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, private schools do receive public funds. They deserve some public scrutiny. Why do we have our public school boards put their information online and not these private schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Rome was not built in one day. I have already released the information on all school boards. We are accumulating information on private schools, and the

public funding component of private schools will be equally published on our website as it is for school boards.

Mr. Hehr: That answer is not good enough, Mr. Speaker. He knows full well that private schools get money, roll it into a pot, and spend it on whatever they like. So with the deepest of respect, would you have private schools outline their entire spending money and what they're actually doing in those schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I don't know, Mr. Speaker, who's rolling pot, but I can tell you one thing. I know for a fact that candidates for the Liberal Party are very supportive of private schools much like most Albertans are. The very fundamental issue and fundamental block of Alberta education is choice. Parents are voting with their feet. They're sending their children where they choose to, and we support that choice by providing 70 per cent of public funding but not any additional contingents of funding.

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

Protection of Job Seekers

Mr. Quest: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. There've been a lot of stories in the news recently about the looming shortage of workers in our province. During the last boom many foreign workers that came to our province in search of jobs were in turn taken advantage of by unscrupulous employment agencies. To the Minister of Service Alberta: as our economy starts to heat up again, what are you doing to ensure that job seekers are protected this time from predatory practices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government works to ensure all job seekers in Alberta are treated fairly. That's why earlier today I announced strict new rules to strengthen protection for job seekers and to make employment agencies more accountable. Many people come to Alberta because of our economic opportunities. However, there are individuals that tend to take advantage of these folks, and that's why the changes in employment agency regulations show that this government is taking action to protect the most vulnerable.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that the minister is making these regulatory changes only now, does this mean that our protections were weak up to this point in time? Why has it taken so long to act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not at all, hon. member. The issue was that just a few years ago we had 158 agencies working; now we have 528. Now, the majority of them are good people, working well in our industry. There are always a few who try to find a way around the law. What we've done is found those loopholes, found areas where they've been hiding behind the law, and found more protection for Albertans.

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good that the government is making this law stronger; however, it's not going to work if it doesn't have any teeth. To the same minister: how will the minister make sure these rules are followed and enforced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The actions we've taken

will do exactly that. We have strict rules. People can face penalties of up to two years in jail and \$100,000 in fines. The actions we've taken will ensure that we will have more evidence and more compliance with our rules. If people are not following our rules, we will have more evidence to prosecute them and bring them to justice.

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

Cost of Premier's Swearing-in Ceremony

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville spent at his swearing-in ceremony as Premier in December 2006 \$10,900 tax dollars. Five years later the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow spent at her swearing-in ceremony as Premier over \$22,000. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Why did this ceremony double in cost at a time when the Progressive Conservative Party racked up over \$7 billion in deficits? [interjections] This is not a laughing matter.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different places where the hon. member could be asking this question, none of which would be in question period. It's not a matter of policy; it's a matter of the budgets. I would encourage the hon. member to find the appropriate place.

Mr. MacDonald: It's in the *Alberta Gazette*, Mr. Speaker, and this cabinet is responsible for what is published in the *Alberta Gazette*.

I'll ask the Minister of Finance this next question. Given that this PC cabinet can spend tax dollars extravagantly on a swearing-in ceremony just like the current Premier, why did the swearing-in ceremony costs for the new cabinet double when you compare them to what the former Premier did in 2006?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to look into this outrageous expenditure, as the member seems to indicate. I think he said that it was 20,000 bucks, but I'll have a look at it and see what it was.

Mr. MacDonald: You look after the pennies, and the dollars will gather themselves.

Now, again to the Deputy Premier: why did these costs for these separate swearing-in ceremonies for both the Premier and the cabinet double – double – at the same time this government had racked up \$7 billion in deficits? Do you not have any respect whatsoever for taxpayers?

Mr. Horner: As the hon. Minister of Finance has stated, he will look into those costs and will verify where the change or the variance was. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, that would come to Public Accounts. That would be my guess as to where that would go. The hon. member should know that, given his years of experience on Public Accounts, but there are many things the hon. member doesn't know.

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

Support for Front-line Social Workers

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Social Work Week is an opportunity to highlight the important work being done by social workers in this province. Within this ministry social workers continue to be challenged with caseloads involving

children and families in extremely difficult situations. To the Minister of Human Services: what is your ministry doing to provide front-line workers with the support they need to do their jobs in a timely and exceptionally efficient manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of introducing a number of social workers today as representatives of that profession, and indeed the lives of thousands of Albertans are touched and changed for the better each day because of the commitment and dedication of social workers and caseworkers. Their work is not easy. I'm pleased to tell you that we're providing additional support for front-line workers by adding 30 new supervisor positions. Supervisors and front-line staff work as teams to review information, make decisions about services, and attend case conferences to discuss strategies for addressing complex cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That partly answered my second question to the same minister. However, how will 30 new supervisory positions help reduce caseloads for front-line workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, by working together, managers, supervisors, and front-line workers can address situations in a way that contributes to the best possible outcomes for families receiving intervention services. Supervisors are directly involved in day-to-day management of cases and work with their managers and front-line staff to manage the workloads. This comes from the report that we had about a year or so ago, which said that we needed to provide more support for the front-line workers, and that's exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: assuming that many of these new supervisory positions will be filled by people currently doing front-line work, will you be hiring more front-line workers to fill any of those vacancies?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. If there are any people from the front line who take these new positions, the positions that they vacate will be filled. We want to have a full complement of these very exceptional, hard-working, and dedicated staff working for the children and families of this province on a day-to-day basis. We want to make sure that they get the support they need and that they achieve the outcomes for those children and families.

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

2:20

Medevac Services

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Medevac services are very important to all of us, especially in my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Lost minutes and lost seconds can mean the difference between life and death for people in northern communities like mine. Less than a year ago the Health Quality Council reported that patient care for medevac patients in Alberta has been compromised, and longer transport times were an increased threat to the well-being of Alberta patients. My

questions are to the Premier. What progress has been made to date on fixing air medevacs and medevac services for northern communities?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct that this is a very important issue for residents of northern Alberta; in fact, for residents even north of Alberta because our medevac actually handles flights coming in from outside the province to the north. The Health Quality Council did have a recommendation that there had to be an alternate landing facility within proximity of the Edmonton International if the City Centre Airport was to close. We are aggressively pursuing two options at this point in time. That would be the Namao air base and the Villeneuve airstrip.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: given that Dr. John Cowell publicly testified at that Public Accounts Committee that there is no way to force government to actually implement Health Quality Council recommendations, how can Albertans have confidence that your government is actually acting on what the Health Quality Council recommended for air medevacs?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we don't need to be forced to act. We're going to do it. We're going to create the alternate landing strip that needs to be done. My goal is to get the ultimate value not only for the medevac services but for taxpayers as a whole and to create a system that is safe and secure for residents of the north.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has failed to act on the Health Quality Council's previous recommendations, how can Albertans and my constituents trust this government? When you haven't acted in the past, how can we trust you to act in the future on Health Quality Council recommendations?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have accepted all 21 of the recent recommendations from the Health Quality Council. We are actively engaged, as I've said. I know that the hon. member reads the papers and also is attuned to what's going on in the media. He would have seen that we are in discussions with the Department of National Defence and the Garrison at Namao although – I will put this on the table – the decision of Namao will be left with the general and the military because we don't want to do anything that would affect their readiness or their operational capability. As soon as they let us know what that decision will be, we will act.

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

First Nations Economic Development

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite Alberta's low unemployment rate First Nations' unemployment is significantly higher than for the nonaboriginal population. The Alberta Coalition for Action on Labour Shortages predicts that there will be soon 114,000 more jobs than people to fill them. To the Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations: how is it that with a looming labour shortage and the federal government's refusal to expand the provincial nominee program, your department is not putting more efforts into employing and promoting the employment of First Nations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. Indeed, it's an opportunity to talk about the many positive initiatives and discussions that we have with First Nations in terms of economic development opportunities throughout this province. Using opportunities like the First Nations development fund, First Nations communities are engaged in developing enterprises, labour training, educational initiatives, creating a readying workforce that can help aboriginal people.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister commit to tabling in this House detailed funding and enrolment for all Alberta provincial government-led programs that employ and/or promote the employment of First Nations?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the programming in this area would fall within our ministry. I won't commit to doing that without first taking a look to see what that might involve. That would be imprudent for me to do so.

I can assure the hon. member that there is much happening. We had a report which was done last year called Connecting the Dots, I believe, which talked about an aboriginal workforce strategy. A number of members of this House participated in that. We're moving forward with First Nations on that report. There are programs like Trade Winds, with the trade unions who are looking for aboriginal apprentices. There are a number of programs in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hopefully, either the hon. Minister for Human Services or the hon. Minister for IAR will commit to providing that information in detail to this House.

To either minister, I suppose. It appears that this government is searching in the far-flung corners of the world for an employment solution that resides here at home. Why has funding for international offices gone up by 60 per cent, but funding for aboriginal programs has remained constant?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remind the hon. member that while I've defended those budget estimates, we have not yet completed the budget process. It is true that we contemplate investments to increase our presence and to explore opportunities for all Albertans to increase their participation in this great economy that we have. Whether those are aboriginal groups or whether they're private enterprises or whether they're families, making connections around the globe is important to ensuring the success of all Albertans.

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

Agricultural Research and Development

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much of agriculture is enjoying a time of unprecedented market returns. Many of my constituents understand the importance of strategic investment in research and innovation to ensure the industry's global competitiveness, and that understanding is the genesis of my question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

What is your department doing to work with producers to ensure that the agriculture industry remains competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As ag minister I'm very proud to be representing the best producers in the world, and we continue to invest in those producers in Alberta. Just last week we invested \$30 million into crop research in the province of Alberta to ensure that our producers remain competitive in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister. I'd ask for some more specifics. Those are big numbers. What are some of the specific investments that will contribute to competitiveness and forward-looking results for the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although some would like to dis the farmers, I guess, last year Alberta farmers exported \$7 billion worth of agricultural products throughout the world. It's imperative that we continue to invest in this, so we have invested into management research, pest surveillance, crop management, food and grain quality and technology, and food safety. All of these things are part of the social licence for agriculture to continue to thrive in this province and advance, and that's something we're proud of on this side.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we opened a new greenhouse facility at Crop Diversification Centre South. I'm interested to know from the minister what that facility is expected to contribute to agriculture's competitiveness in the future, and will it be available to my constituents who are involved in crop production research?

Mr. Berger: Thank you once again, hon. member. This new facility represents a \$17 million investment on behalf of the government of Alberta into greenhouse technology in Alberta. For those on the other side who aren't listening, I'd like them to know there are 310 acres under greenhouse roof in Alberta. Some of this technology will actually work in Wood Buffalo if somebody is listening.

This, Mr. Speaker, is very important. We have the technology there in a modern greenhouse with unmatched capabilities for research, demonstration, development, commercialization, education, and extension.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Alberta Multimedia Development Fund

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. All of my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Services. First, I'd like to give my thanks to the culture ministry for listening to me and the film and television community and making some much-needed changes to the multimedia fund, but snuck in there with these changes was a requirement that applications will be assessed by a panel for suitability. Now, this is new. To the minister of culture: can the minister explain to us how this expert panel is not a censorship panel to deny applications for films that might embarrass the government?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments about the Alberta multimedia development fund and the streamlining that we have done in that area. I think it's important to note that there are a lot of great projects that are being funded across Alberta, and these projects will continue to be funded based on the merits and based on the projects that are brought forward.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, can the minister tell me exactly what this section means, then? It talks about, number one, assessment and notification: "Department staff will convene an expert panel to assess applications and make grant recommendations to the Minister." That's an entirely new section, and it has to do with censorship. Could the minister please explain it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the depth and the wealth of productions that are being done here all contribute to what we have here in Alberta. The process that's in place is nothing about censorship because of the projects that come forward, the Global Visions Film Festival and some of the great film festivals that we have here in Alberta and around the world. This is not about censorship. This is about dollars being used prudently and making sure that the projects brought forward are thought out.

Ms Blakeman: So if there is a film with well-known and reputable production people involved with it that is presented to this expert panel but they are contemplating a film that may not be complimentary to this current government, are you telling me that they're going to be able to go ahead with full funding?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear with the number of films that have been funded through this program for a number of years that there are some excellent productions. Again, this is nothing about censorship. It is about the process, it is about the dollars that are put aside in this fund, and it's about the creative energy we have in this province and the talent that we have and about the choices they need to make when they produce films in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Gasoline and Diesel Prices

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, the price of oil is on the rise again, and I'm getting a lot of calls from constituents about the price of gasoline at the pumps. My question to the Minister of Energy: since we have so much oil right under our feet, why is it that we have to pay such a high price, at well over a dollar a litre, for our gasoline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The bad news is that gasoline and diesel prices are going up again. The good news is, though, that in Alberta we still have among the lowest prices in all of Canada. Both gas and diesel prices are set mainly by supply and demand both internationally and locally. Internationally tensions in the Middle East and supply disruptions there are cutting back on supply. Locally, though, we benefit by

the proximity of refineries to oil and, therefore, lower transportation costs. That contributes to our relatively low cost compared to other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be very interested to know: just where does Alberta rank in price, and what are the taxes that are associated with gas and diesel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I'd be very happy to supply that information. We still, as I said, have among the lowest gasoline and diesel prices in Canada. This is due mainly to the fact that we have the lowest fuel tax, only 9 cents. To get right down to the details, gas in Edmonton and Calgary right now is averaging around \$1.08 a litre. That's 30 cents cheaper than St. John's, 27 cents cheaper than Vancouver, and 24 cents cheaper than Montreal. For diesel, in fact, we are the lowest in Canada, around \$1.16 a litre right now. That's 29 cents cheaper than Vancouver, 25 cents cheaper than Montreal.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for that information, but I'm curious: why is the price of diesel now higher than the price of gasoline when this is not the traditional ratio?

Dr. Morton: Again, the hon. member is absolutely right. Historically, diesel tends to be less expensive than gasoline, but again I'd repeat that last year we had the lowest average retail diesel price in all of Canada. The reason for the change is economic development. The pace of economic development in Alberta is so strong right now that the demand for diesel keeps going up. But I'm happy to report that, thanks to the work we're doing in working with North West upgrader, we're bringing on not just a new upgrading plant but that they'll also be producing diesel that will contribute to the increase in supply and reduce prices.

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

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been hearing from school boards that there are major challenges with the new cookie-cutter P3 schools built under the ASAP program, that school designs are not flexible. For example, the Edmonton school board wants schools with cafeterias in them, where students can eat and meet, but there is no room in the new schools for this. To the Minister of Infrastructure: if every student is different, every school board is unique in its needs, why is every school built the same?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, every school is not built the same. Different school projects across the province are evaluated based on whether a P3 makes sense or not, whether a design-bid build makes sense, or whether it should just be a modernization. There are approximately 40 P3s that we're going to have in the province going forward. If there are specific issues with any of those P3 schools, I'd like to hear about it because up until now we haven't heard a lot of concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It came up in the Public Accounts Committee meeting that there were issues with the designs.

Given that his department loves to crow about how much money they claim to have saved on these schools, can he tell this House how much of those savings comes on the backs of the students, who cannot have the cafeterias or extra classrooms which they need?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the savings that are coming from the P3s are coming in a number of ways. One of the things that it enables us to do is to build more schools for more students in more communities. At the end of the day everyone is trying to work to put the students at the centre of this, including the Minister of Education with his new Education Act, the school board trustees, and everyone on this side of the House.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, to the minister again: can the minister tell us why the decisions about where and how schools are built are made by the government in Edmonton instead of at local school boards elected by and accountable to Albertans?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked, we are elected by and accountable to Albertans as well.

The entire priority list, how we decide on which schools are built, is done in consultation with the ministries and all stakeholders, Treasury Board. There are a number of people involved in that. No one can question the investments Alberta is making in capital in this province. It's significant and outpaces all the other provinces in the country. And we're doing that because we're putting the students first.

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

Skilled Labour Shortage

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's prosperity depends on having enough skilled labour to keep our economic growth on track. I'm hearing lots of talk about bringing immigration from outside of Canada to Alberta. All of my questions are for the Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations. What progress has your department made to address Alberta's labour shortage, and what are you doing to support Albertans?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, employing Albertans is always our first priority, but our approach in addressing labour needs is multifaceted. We work in collaboration with Human Services and a variety of other ministries in making sure that underrepresented groups in our population such as aboriginal people and mature workers have opportunities in the workforce. We also work directly with businesses, engaging them in finding ways to help mature workers participate.

When workers aren't available locally or from other parts of Canada . . .

The Speaker: I think we'll move on. The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next question, same minister: if immigration is part of the solution, how are you ensuring that Alberta's needs are reflected in immigration policy that is set in Ottawa?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to discuss Alberta's concerns with the federal immigration minister, Jason Kenney, actually in Calgary about a week ago. We talked

about a number of ways that skilled workers might come to Alberta, including American labour possibilities. We also discussed how businesses could play a more active role in identifying the skilled labour that they need. The federal minister is considering a number of changes that I believe would give employers more opportunities in selecting prospective immigrants. This is a . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's encouraging to see that the province and federal government are working together on this matter. My next question, same minister. Working together only gets us half of the way there. How are we going to ensure that Alberta's priorities are being addressed in Ottawa?

2:40

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, this issue is a priority. Of course, that's why my department is supporting our Deputy Premier, who will be travelling to Ottawa next week. He'll be meeting with the Alberta caucus down there and federal ministers, and immigration is going to be on the agenda for every discussion that the Deputy Premier will have.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we continue to build these collaborative relationships with our federal partners. This has been incited by our Premier. Right from her initial instalment she made it a priority that we want to improve the tenor of our relationship, that we want to have open and constructive dialogue, that we want to continue to make progress.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude the question-and-answer period for today. Eighteen members were recognized, 108 questions and responses.

In a very few short seconds from now we will continue the Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Heart Function Clinics

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to inform Albertans about the great work that's occurring at two of our state-of-the-art heart function clinics. They've dramatically increased access and advancements in heart care for all Albertans. Over the past two years the C.K. Hui Heart Centre and the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute have made remarkable progress and impact in the areas of research, professional knowledge growth, and preventive awareness among Albertans.

They've also significantly increased our province's heart patient intake capacity, improved collaboration between health care providers, and radically shortened referral times. Referral times for heart failure patients have dropped by 75 per cent, from eight weeks to two weeks, over the past two years. Individuals who are referred by a doctor to a heart function clinic are now able to see a specialist and begin a treatment plan much sooner than before, and of course this is invaluable since the quicker the start of a treatment plan, the better the long-term outcome for the patient. All of this good work adds up to 1,900 Albertans with heart failure receiving superior attention at these two heart function clinics at any given time. That's thousands of Alberta heart patients receiving the best possible opportunity to live longer and enjoy a higher quality of life.

I trust that all members of the House will join me in congratulating the doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, and other health professionals within Alberta Health Services who've ensured that Albertans who have experienced heart failure will have a stronger and brighter future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Kathleen Sendall

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the achievements of Kathleen Sendall of Calgary, recently named a member of the Order of Canada for her contributions to the advancement of women in engineering and in the corporate sector. Ms Sendall is currently serving as vice-chair of the board of directors of Alberta Innovates: Energy and Environment Solutions. Before joining us at Alberta Innovates, she was senior vice-president of Petro-Canada's North American natural gas business unit.

She has also served as president of the Calgary chapter of the International Women's Forum and co-chaired their World Leadership Conference on Water, Wealth and Power in Montreal in October of 2010. She is past president of the Canadian Academy of Engineering and a former governor of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. In 2007 she was inducted into Canada's most powerful women top 100 hall of fame. Mr. Speaker, Kathleen remains an active member of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta and the Society of Petroleum Engineers as well as the Michaëlle Jean Foundation and the Calgary Opera. No wonder she has been named to the Order of Canada.

Please join me in congratulating this extraordinary Alberta woman for her many accomplishments and this well-deserved recognition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Judicial Inquiry into Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's time to blow the lid off this decade-long government cover-up of abuse and financial mismanagement in the health care system. Health professionals and the public deserve to know the truth. The inconvenient truth is that current and past ministers of health, the former board chair and CEO of Capital health, the chair of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and the college registrar have knowledge and perhaps have not felt free to speak on these issues.

In a personal e-mail from Dr. Joffe, then president of the Capital Region Medical Staff Association, in November 2010 to the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark he said:

I've offered you support before and want to do [it] again.

I was called this morning by Dr. Tim Winton... heard you on 630 CHED. Tim phoned me as he was concerned about you.

As you may or may not know, Tim went through a Capital Health "process" similar to the one you went through some years ago. His went on for several years and ultimately destroyed his career. He knows what it is like to be isolated, marginalized and challenged, even though you are RIGHT. He also knows what it's like to have the College involved and have challenges to your mental health.

He is concerned for you, as am I. His direct advice to you is that it is time to go underground. You have made your position clear – further discussion... allows others to challenge

and destroy... credibility. First they will destroy your credibility in the Legislature and then as a physician. The more you speak now, the more opportunity they will have to challenge and destroy you.

As mentioned, Tim has been through it. He understands the strategy of isolation, marginalization and then challenges to your mental health status. He's been through it all.

... He has come out on top, though with irreparable damage to his career. He is now an expert in these things and is more than willing to help you, as he has some others in similar situations.

Take care of yourself. We are here and willing to help.

Mark

This Premier must now do what she said she would do last year, include health worker intimidation and financial misconduct in the public inquiry. It's clear this PC government is more...

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cold Lake. [interjection] Go ahead.

World Kidney Day

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak about World Kidney Day. This year the Kidney Foundation of Canada's goal is to bring awareness to the importance of organ donation and the positive outcomes of transplants.

Kidney donation is the most frequent and successful type of living organ donation, yet since 2006 donor rates have become stagnant. With the number of Canadians being treated for kidney failure tripling over the past 20 years, organ donation is more vital than ever. About 2.6 million Canadians have kidney disease or are at risk of developing it.

In 2010, 1,248 people received a kidney transplant, but over 3,300 people were still waiting. Each day about 16 people are told that their kidneys have failed. Albertans with kidney failure spend a number of hours each day or week on dialysis and can wait anywhere from a few months to several years for a transplant.

The need for organs is far greater than the available supply, which is why the government of Alberta established the living donor expense reimbursement program to minimize the potential financial burden associated with the living organ donation process.

Today on World Kidney Day I encourage all Albertans to talk about organ donation with their friends and families and to make their wishes known. Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first one is on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. These are 10 separate letters outlining concerns by various individuals, and these concerns are related to mental health care and the resources provided. This is to the government of Alberta.

The second tabling I have is an e-mail dated November 26, 2010, from an A. Mark Joffe to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. That was in reference to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View's recent private member's statement.

The third tabling I have is information that I have from the *Alberta Gazette* indicating that the swearing-in ceremony for Alberta's 13th Premier cost \$10,900 and the cabinet swearing-in ceremony at the same time in 2006 was \$2,684.

The next tabling I have is also related to the questions that I asked in the Assembly this afternoon, which was the swearing-in ceremony for Alberta's 14th Premier on October 7, 2011. The cost of this was \$22,147, a doubling in five years. Also noted here is the cabinet's swearing-in ceremony from October 12, 2011. It cost \$5,500, again double from what it was in 2007. That's proof of what I had talked . . .

2:50

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

Mr. MacDonald: I have another tabling, sir.

The Speaker: Oh, sorry. You're not finished?

Mr. MacDonald: No, I'm not.

This is correspondence that I have written and received in my capacity as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and this is correspondence I have received from the current Minister of Finance and also the current candidate for Calgary-West, Mr. Hughes.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. My first is a further 20 e-mails out of the hundreds I receive from the following individuals who are seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness and who believe clear-cutting will damage the ecology, watershed, wildlife, and natural species and must be prohibited at all costs. These e-mails come from Sue Arlidge, Nancy Dalgleish, Brian Danniels, Eva Torn Thomas, Sandra Clements, Chris Whelan, Jason Taylor, Teresa Looy, Daniel and Maxine Rudy, Kristine Kowalchuk, Stephanie Michaels, Susan Como, Gerard Drotar, Alexis Harper, Eileen Patterson, Lara Grinevitch, Nick Stanley, Darlene Robb, and Cherie Lowe.

My second tabling is an information sheet from the chair of the Greater Bragg Creek FireSmart Committee, Clint Docken, stating that the committee has been developing a greater Bragg Creek wildfire mitigation strategy since 2008 and recommending that proposed logging by Spray Lake Sawmills be planned with the collaboration of all parties in the west Bragg Creek land users group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail received from Janet Quon, who is a University of Alberta pharmacy class of 2012 and identifies herself as one of my constituents. Ms Quon is particularly concerned about the inadequate reimbursement model for generic drugs and is very concerned that this is going to affect her ability to provide patient care along with other pharmacists' ability to do that at the same time and asked me to bring this forward.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and, quite frankly, proud to table the required number of copies of a media release and letter of support for the Northern Gateway project that the Capital Region Board issued earlier today. The board consists of 24 member municipalities in the Edmonton region. They believe – and, in fact, they are correct – that there are significant

and tangible benefits to the Northern Gateway project that extend far beyond Alberta's borders, and they are encouraging the joint review panel to approve it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. First of all, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents regarding the drilling stimulus program. They relate to my questions earlier today and indicate that there is a massive oversubscription to the program as well as showing that the number of rigs go up and down relating to oil prices, not to the program.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of some additional postcards that we've received from 50 Edmontonians calling on the government to provide full funding to open the family medicine and urgent care sections of the East Edmonton health centre.

Mr. Speaker, I have also today the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail and a power bill sent to us by Ann Baran of Iron Springs. Her power bill is for February 2012. Her electric energy charges were \$498.19, and she asks: "How can anyone budget for such fluctuations in the price per kWh? Why are there such dramatic changes reflected in each bill?"

We have an e-mail from Sandra Kraus of Mossleigh, who sent us her power bill from February, 2012 in the amount of \$245.44. She says: "Too many people are living high on the hog at the expense of the average hard working Albertan. Enough is enough!"

Mr. Speaker, I have an e-mail here that was sent by Tom and Michelle Bentt of Edmonton to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. They wrote:

The fact is deregulation benefits only the utility companies – not the consumers . . . Those of us who are on pensions, on disability allowances, single parent families, & the working poor – among others – are adversely affected by what can only be called unbridled greed!

Mr. Speaker, I'm also tabling a bill and comments from Suzanne Schmidt of Stony Plain. Her electricity charges for January 2012 were \$611.39.

Mr. Speaker, there's also one from Dennis and Corinne Cowan of Sandy Lane. They have sent us their bill for January 2012, which, including distribution charges, came to \$294.86.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also tabling a bill from Ryan Reich from Edmonton from February of 2012. His electric energy charges came to \$211.97.

Mr. Speaker, we have a bill from Lee Fremont of Gibbons, who sent us his January 2012 bill in the amount of \$483.96.

Also, John Biollo of Leduc sent us his February 2012 bill for \$244.46.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a bill from Joyce Aitken of Calgary from January 2012, which shows her electricity charges for that month to be \$421.47.

Mr. Speaker, Mickel Auger of Beaver county sent us his bill from January 2012, which came to \$438.94.

Mr. Speaker, also Brad and Sonja Avramenko of Leduc county sent us what they consider an outrageous bill for January 2012 for \$568.51.

Mr. Speaker, Edward Bieber's electricity bill for January 2012 came to \$213.23. He sent us his bill.

Just a couple more. Debbie Paulon of Edmonton sent us her January 2012 bill in the amount of \$501.02.

Two more. Bob Horne from Entwistle sent us his bill of \$352.73, and Edmontonian Brenda Rogal's bill for February 2012 was \$337.46.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of all of these electricity bills so that all members of the House can know what Albertans are facing on a monthly basis.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of the materials that were referred to in the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore's question earlier today.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, that took 17 minutes. Some of the tablings had to do with questions, which is quite okay. A lot of tablings had to do with other things.

Hon. members, remember that in the past the chair has oftentimes stated that in other jurisdictions the only tablings that are permitted are those which are legislatively required by the laws of the jurisdiction they're in. This is one of those great subject matters that could easily be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for review.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to ask the Government House Leader to share with us projected government business for the evening commencing the 12th of March, and this is under Standing Order 7(6).

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, on the evening of March 12 the Legislature will not be sitting, but the policy field committees will continue with estimates as referred to them. But on the 13th of March in the afternoon in the Committee of Supply what every member of the House has been waiting for with bated breath, the estimates of Human Services, will be the order of the day, and then as per the Order Paper if there's any time remaining.

In the evening we will anticipate, in accordance with the schedule that has been filed and in accordance with the motion passed by the House, that the votes on the main estimates would then be taken. Members of the Chamber are reminded that if there are any exceptions to the votes, I think there's a procedure in the standing orders for those to be identified a day earlier.

3:00

Following the vote on the main estimates, as per the motion passed earlier in this House, the House would rise out of Committee of Supply and would sit, and we would expect that we would continue with second reading on Bill 2, the Education Act; Bill 4, St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act; Bill 5, Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act; Bill 6, Property Rights Advocate Act.

On Wednesday, March 14, in the afternoon for second reading we would anticipate Bill 4, St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act; Bill 5, Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act; Bill 6, Property Rights Advocate Act; and perhaps in Committee of the Whole Bill 2, Education Act; and as per the Order Paper. In the evening we would anticipate the same type of

rotation, with second reading of bills 5 and 6, Committee of the Whole on perhaps bills 2 and 4, and as per the Order Paper.

I believe that on Wednesday we would also have, the vote having been taken on Tuesday night, first reading of the Appropriation Act, which would mean that on Thursday, March 15, in the afternoon second reading of the Appropriation Act, and we would anticipate continuing with second reading of bills 5 and 6 and as per the Order Paper.

I would apologize to the members. I did distribute, as is our practice, a copy of this to other members earlier, but I note that it did not have on it the reference to the Appropriation Act. I apologize. That should be added.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Address to House by Mr. Rick Hansen

11. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that

- (1) Mr. Rick Hansen be invited to the floor of this Chamber to address the Legislative Assembly on Monday, March 12, 2012;
 - (2) This address be the first item of business after the singing of *O Canada*; and
 - (3) The ordinary business of the Assembly resume upon the conclusion of Mr. Hansen's address;
- and be it further resolved that Mr. Hansen's address become part of the permanent records of the Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I gave oral notice of yesterday, I had the privilege of receiving from yourself a memo dated Monday, March 5, indicating that Rick Hansen would be in Edmonton on his 25th anniversary tour, commemorating his tour around the world with respect to raising the profile of persons with disabilities and spinal injury. You noted in that memo that on a previous occasion he had been invited to speak on the floor of the House, so I would move Government Motion 11.

I think it appropriate, Mr. Speaker, to acquiesce in your request that he be invited on this 25th anniversary given that the House did have him before the House on the 10th anniversary of his circumnavigating the globe.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I will say at the outset that my caucus is supportive of this motion, but I just wanted to note the number of other groups that don't have the opportunity to come onto the floor of the Alberta Legislature and make their comments to us. Certainly, Mr. Hansen has done extraordinary work raising funds and augmenting research into spinal cord injury in Canada, and indeed other countries are able to benefit from his work, but I want to do a shout-out to the many other groups that work for a better quality of life.

We were very honoured today to have a wonderful presentation from the Member for Lesser Slave Lake talking about the REDress project, that is being done across Canada in memory of aboriginal women who have died or gone missing. There are also groups that are seeking equality across the country, seeking better benefits and support so that they can integrate appropriately, and there are a number of other groups that we could get into that are just advocating for attention and money.

We are fortunate to have Mr. Hansen here in Canada and, indeed, here on the floor, but I think it's important to recognize that there are a number of other groups who are not here and could equally be here and, I would hope, get as warm a welcome as I'm sure we will give Mr. Hansen.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

The Speaker: I appreciate that response from the Legislative Assembly. Mr. Hansen is unique. He's a Canadian icon. He's been in this Assembly, one of only four or five people to ever have been invited into this Assembly. He is not here to petition anything from anyone. He will be here to say thank you to the people of Alberta for supporting his quest of 25 years. No one is coming and I will never recommend that anybody ever be brought onto the floor to petition the members of the Assembly. There would simply be 47,000 requests. This is a unique thank you. That's the only purpose.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5 Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today and begin second reading on Bill 5, the Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act.

As I said in December, when I brought the private member's bill forward in second reading, a seniors' property tax deferral program will help senior homeowners in our province. Seniors will be able to use their home's equity to defer all or part of their property taxes, reallocating that money to other areas of their lives and to other priorities. Freed-up funds could be used by the senior homeowner for things like home repairs and modifications and will help seniors remain in their homes longer.

We all know that the costs of living are on the rise while the incomes of many seniors remain fixed. While I'm proud of all the work our government does on a daily basis to provide support to over 425,000 seniors, this new program is an innovative way for us to do more. I say innovative because as the former minister responsible for seniors I know the demographic challenges we are facing in light of an aging population. The seniors population will soon outnumber the population of our children and youth. For the first time ever there will be more grandparents than grandchildren.

That's why a program like this, which offers so much opportunity and flexibility to senior homeowners, is a positive addition to our senior-related programs and services. Homeowners will be given the opportunity to take a loan to defer all or part of their property taxes until they sell their home or otherwise choose to repay the loan. The government will pay municipalities the property tax owed on behalf of that senior. There will be minimal interest charged to the senior for this loan, which makes it widely accessible.

While this program offers a fresh approach, I feel it's imperative to note that it is also in line with policy directions and research of this government. It is in line with the findings of the Demographic Planning Commission, which in 2008 heard from over 100 stakeholder organizations and 10,000 Albertans that seniors want to live in their own homes for as long as possible. The findings from the Demographic Planning Commission helped to form the aging population policy framework, that I released in

2010, and that framework is helping this government plan for current and future seniors by providing guidelines on the roles, principles, and key directions we are taking to meet the demands of an aging population.

This bill is also in line with the continuing care strategy, which is intended to provide more options to help seniors age in the right place, in their homes and in their communities surrounded by friends and family. I am proud that our government supports seniors' independence and that we are supporting a province where our seniors remain in our communities, where they continue to have many positive impacts on our younger generations and will have for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:10

Bill 4 St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 4, the St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act. As Minister of Education I often speak of the strength that educational choice delivers to our system. Public schools, separate schools, francophone, charter, private, and home education programming provide a rich diversity of options and opportunity for Albertans.

Like many other Albertans, the situation in the town of Morinville regarding educational programming and choice has been an area of important interest to me. Quite simply, I firmly believe that we must act to rectify this situation. We must act to affirm the quality education programming that already exists in the town, and we also must act to ensure educational choice and voice. With this piece of important legislation, Mr. Speaker, we are doing just that.

The Alberta we live in today didn't spring up all at once. It was composed slowly from diverse communities coming together over time, from counties merging and separating and small towns becoming bustling communities. Throughout this process the makeup of communities changed. When the public school district in St. Albert and most surrounding communities was first established, the denominational majority was the Roman Catholic faith. When the separate school district in St. Albert was established, the denominational minority was the Protestant faith. This differs from most of the province, where separate school districts were established by Roman Catholic minorities.

Since that time the overall demographics in the area have changed. The education system in these areas must also change in order to better meet the needs of these communities and ensure that students in these communities have choice and voice. As Alberta continues to grow and navigate through the 21st century, historical anomalies like Morinville's lack of secular education option start to stick out like a sore thumb.

Many people in Morinville are perfectly happy with the current arrangement and are indeed receiving the world-class education that Alberta is known for. However, it is understandable that parents and students have been advocating for a system that ensures everyone can access a learning environment that makes them feel most comfortable. Bill 4 represents a compromise between three school jurisdictions, and I must congratulate and express my gratitude to the Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic regional division, the St. Albert Protestant separate school district,

and the Sturgeon school division for their commitment to developing a local solution.

Bill 4 reflects many of the elements of their collaboration and compromise. Compromise, Mr. Speaker, as you know, is not easy because it means that everyone has to make some sacrifices. But just because something has always been one way doesn't make it right. Not everyone will be happy with how the situation was resolved, and I acknowledge that, but it is still the right solution. Bill 4 will redefine education in the Sturgeon Valley forever, and that's a good thing.

Morinville's population is booming, and this bill accommodates the rapidly growing and changing face of that town. Just like the growing pains I spoke of earlier, progress is sometimes hard, but again it's a good thing.

Here is what the legislation will do. It provides the framework in which parents in these communities can exercise the right to a secular education for their children while enabling parents of the minority faith to exercise the separate school rights and privileges guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada.

It also recognizes that the educational needs of a community are best served by a democratically elected school board and that the right to vote for their school board gives parents a voice in the education of their children. Parents across the region will have choice between two different school boards, just like parents in communities across our entire province.

First, it will establish a public school district in St. Albert that will replace the St. Albert Protestant separate school district. Second, it will establish a Roman Catholic separate school district that will replace the Greater St. Albert Catholic school division. This change needs to happen because we cannot have two separate school boards covering the same area. Simply, you cannot have two minorities in the same area.

The new Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic separate school district will serve those geographic areas previously served by the Greater St. Albert Catholic regional division in addition to those served by two nonoperating school boards in the area, the Cardiff Roman Catholic separate school district and the Cunningham Roman Catholic separate school district. Roman Catholic parents in these areas will now be able to run for and vote for school board trustees, giving them a voice in the education of their children.

Finally, the Sturgeon school division will be expanded to serve the Morinville and Legal areas. This means that non-Catholic residents of Morinville and Legal will become residents of the Sturgeon school division, allowing them to run for and vote for the Sturgeon school division trustees. This does mean some changes as the St. Albert Protestant separate school district loses the protection of a separate school board. They did advocate hard, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, to protect their right, but ultimately they are focusing on ensuring a quality education for local residents, and they will be governed in the same way as other public school boards in the province. The legislation sets up these new arrangements separately.

Work will be needed and will be done on infrastructure, financial, and operational matters, and that work has already started. The Sturgeon school division will assume ownership of a school in Morinville. Parents choosing a secular education will have a space to call their own. The details of which school and what shared space arrangements might be required have not yet been determined.

The St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act is a targeted solution to a local issue. It's also a great example of the provincial government working with a community to find a legislative answer to a local issue. This is a decision that

puts students first and affirms educational choice and educational voice. This is the most important thing, more important than building jurisdictional boundaries or religious differences. Our education system is ultimately about the child, and I hope that all members will consider that when voting on this bill.

I am proud of Bill 4, Mr. Speaker, proud of the partnerships forged, proud of the leadership of the three school boards and the towns and communities. Most of all, I am proud that we are doing right by our kids. That's what the Alberta education system is all about.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the support already expressed by members on both sides of this House regarding this legislation, and I encourage its passage as soon as possible in order that choice and voice can become a reality in Morinville.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Property Rights Advocate Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act.

This act supports the government's position that landowners must have recourse to an independent tribunal or the courts or both for the purpose of determining full and fair compensation for access to their land. At the heart of this proposed legislation is a property rights advocate office, that would provide Alberta landowners with impartial, independent information about property rights and help them navigate through the process. The establishment of this office is a direct response to concerns heard by the Property Rights Task Force these past months and directly reflects this government's commitment to listen to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, let me walk you through the proposed legislation and explain the rationale behind it. During the course of the leadership race the Premier heard repeatedly from passionate Albertans who were concerned that their property rights hadn't been respected in the past. Recently the Premier felt a need to move towards a more common-sense approach when it comes to property rights, so the Premier created a task force to listen to the concerns of these people.

That's exactly what we did. Members of this government travelled the province in December and January seeking input from Albertans on property rights. Our goal was to listen to their concerns and to find grassroots solutions to the property rights concerns that were raised. It was my privilege to participate in the task force with the chair, the hon. Minister of Environment and Water; the vice-chair, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development; and all of the other ministers and MLAs on this task force. As well, several other members of government joined us on our tour of 10 communities across the province, from Grimshaw to Lethbridge.

3:20

We heard first-hand the concerns of landowners about their property rights at these open houses, and we heard from Albertans who completed an online survey. They mailed, they e-mailed, or they called in their feedback to our government. I'm pleased to say that more than 1,400 Albertans participated, and I believe that such a strong turnout indicates the importance of property rights to

all Albertans. Recently we have released the document on both what we heard and our response to the concerns raised by Albertans.

The viewpoints provided by Albertans were fairly consistent and can be broken into four overarching themes. First, Albertans told us that they must be actively consulted about decisions that affect them. Landowners said that they sometimes are confused by legislative changes and also sometimes feel that decisions are made behind closed doors. They told us that their opinions must be taken more seriously through consultation and engagement in all property rights issues.

Second, landowners said that they need to be assured that they have access to courts. They said that they felt the current access to the courts is restricted and that fair and easy access is a fundamental principle of democracy.

Third, when use of land is required, landowners expect appropriate compensation. In cases of expropriation and compensatory actions, landowners felt that their rights are seen to be less important than the rights of industry regardless of landowner concerns.

Lastly, and most vocally and passionately, they asked for an advocate to help them navigate through the process and that this advocate would be the key to ensuring what we call the three Cs: consultation, compensation, and access to the courts. This strong desire for an advocate is the reason I am here today to discuss Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act. It is very clear that Albertans expect us to ensure their core values are represented when making decisions in the public interest. We believe that landowners should be consulted about proposed legislation that affects property rights, that public information about property rights and concerns should be readily available, and that appropriate consultation should be conducted in advance of projects undertaken for the public good.

We also believe that landowners should be appropriately compensated where their lands are affected by expropriation, and they should have recourse to tribunals such as the Land Compensation Board and the courts. Therefore, under the Property Rights Advocate Act a property rights advocate office will be established. The advocate will report to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General and will provide independent and impartial information about property rights. The office will help people determine the appropriate resolution mechanism, including the courts, through which they can have their property rights concerns addressed.

Additionally, the advocate will listen to complaints relating to expropriation of land and will review those complaints and prepare a report setting out findings and any recommendations that result. The advocate will be required to table an annual report on the advocate office's business each year in the Legislature. This will promote landowner confidence that the government is transparent and accountable for its record on respecting property rights.

The legislation that creates the advocate also makes it clear that Alberta's Expropriation Act takes precedence over any other land legislation and that all applicable rights to compensation in the courts remain in force. The work of the task force in the introduction of Bill 6 reinforces our desire to continually engage in useful dialogue that shapes how we approach property rights and other important issues, and it strengthens landowner interests as development throughout the province occurs.

Your continued support of the work of this task force is appreciated. I'm very proud that under the Premier's direction we are using the comments and solutions provided to us by Albertans to make improvements that will benefit all landowners now and

into the future. This is a promise that the Premier has made and kept.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2 Education Act

[Debate adjourned February 22: Mrs. Forsyth speaking]

The Speaker: I've had three members advise me of their intent to speak: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and then I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Education Act. Just some comments with regard to the bill. While the government claims the bill will strengthen public education, it doesn't do anything to stop public funds from going to private schools and will actually strengthen charter schools by allowing their charters to be issued on a continuing basis instead of just on a temporary basis.

Charter schools are further bolstered by the recent government announcement that charters will now be able to be renewed for a maximum of 15-year terms instead of just five. The bill also reduces transparency with regard to charter schools by moving the requirements for what must be included in a charter into regulation.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Alberta Teachers' Association has raised other concerns about strengthening charter schools in this bill. It removes the right of first refusal, that school boards currently have, to request to offer an alternative program. The ATA has said that "if parents want an alternative educational program, school boards have the opportunity to offer the program first before parents can establish a charter school." This provision does not exist in Bill 2, which would permit charter schools to be set up with the sole purpose of pulling students from an equivalent public program. This change could also allow charter schools to shift from focusing on innovation and, instead, to simply compete with the public education system, much like private schools now do but with full public funding.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the current act requires that a charter school should have "significant support from the community in which it is to be located," but Bill 2 does not contain this requirement. It means that charter schools would no longer be required to actively serve their community's needs.

Third, the current act contains the following provision, that "the operator of a charter school established by the Minister must restrict its purposes to the operation of that charter school," and that provision is now gone in Bill 2. This change could allow operators to run charter schools in ways that enhance their personal profits. An example is that under Bill 2 a charter school could, for example, be run by a corporation that sells computers, thus ensuring that students use a specific brand of technology and in the process preparing them as future consumers of that product.

Mr. Speaker, the bill doesn't do anything to combat the significant school fees that currently exist, and the details of what these school fees can entail are being hidden in regulations instead of being included in the bill. The upcoming regulatory review on school fees that the minister has promised will not be subject to public or legislative scrutiny even though it's a very important issue. Although boards cannot charge tuition fees to resident

students under section 13 currently, school fees on their own can inhibit access to education. According to a recent Edmonton public school board information report the average amount of instructional fees paid by the EPSB student family is \$69, and that does not include other kinds of costs such as transportation fees.

The government is now making quite a big deal about how this bill will strengthen deterrents to bullying, but they haven't actually taken the most significant actions that are needed. We still, for example, don't have enough teachers. More teachers means more supervision, means fewer opportunities for students to bully each other. But we have 480 fewer teachers working in Alberta schools than we did at this time last year, and the Minister of Education is not encouraging goodwill around the bargaining table by saying that whatever amount of money is in the budget for teachers is basically the province's final offer.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

Furthermore, the government is good at talking about bullying, but what of the implementation of these measures? What is the timeline for boards to comply? What are the consequences for boards that don't comply? What new resources and supports have been offered to help with bullying outside of schools since that's now covered in the act as well?

Much bullying focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity, yet neither of these things is contained in the Alberta Education program of study.

Also, Mr. Speaker, this act has not repealed the Bill 44 changes to the Human Rights Act that make it harder for teachers to deal with human rights related issues in the classroom, including important bullying-related issues such as homophobia. This bill simply updates the Human Rights Act so that this damaging provision can continue to operate.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, this bill contains no action on full-day kindergarten or removing grade 3 provincial exams. After copious amounts of consultation that preceded this bill, the government announced in January that they will be reviewing provincial achievement tests and examining the operational requirements of full-day kindergarten. Since then the minister and the government say that the government is moving forward on full-day kindergarten but won't have it in place for the beginning of the 2012-13 year as the Premier had promised during her leadership campaign.

It doesn't really seem that the province has its act together on full-day kindergarten, and it continues to drag its feet on making the needed changes to provincial exams. As Public Interest Alberta has pointed out, there's been plenty of time to examine and review. It's time for action on these important issues.

Neither this bill nor the government's recent budget show any leadership in tackling a huge problem in our education system, which is deferred maintenance. For example, in 2011 the Edmonton public school district's buildings were worth a total of \$2.3 billion, and the amount of deferred maintenance on these buildings was as high as \$242 million.

Since there are no major changes between this version of the bill and last year's, it looks like the current minister's recent consultation, *Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right*, has been nothing more than a PR exercise.

I think there are serious deficiencies and blind spots with respect to this bill. I believe that the government is opening up the public school system to competition with similar programs from charter schools, with full public funding, that will divide the education system. It is not ensuring that charter schools have the

required limitations to make sure that they truly make an additional contribution that cannot be provided in the public system.

They are, in fact, setting up the situation in which we're going to see much competition and division in the public school system, all funded by the taxpayer. That's not the kind of education system that we in the NDP see in the future. We are strong supporters of public education. The whole idea of corporate values like competition in the system are not the kinds of values that I think most Albertans would like to see in the system. In that sense, I think this bill will actually undermine our public education system, and I think that that is a very, very unfortunate development, Mr. Speaker.

That concludes my comments at second reading, and we will have more to say at the committee stage as well. Thank you and the Assembly for your attention.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to comment on or put questions to the previous speech.

Seeing no one under 29(2)(a), the chair is pleased to recognize Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking forward to and dreading the introduction of this act, looking forward to it because education is so important to me. It's important to my family; both of my parents were teachers. My mother's whole career was working for the Edmonton public school board in what they called the primary system then. My father came into the school system when they started the vocational trades high schools here in Alberta and then taught until his retirement. I have an expectation and a responsibility to education. I think it is our key to the future. I have seen it raise people out of terrible circumstances and set them on a path to self-discovery, creativity, and great success.

I'm dreading it because I've just learned over the years that when this government brings forward a bill, they will do some good things and then they will do some things that will offend me to my core, and I just am not sure which is which yet. This is a monster bill. Going by weight it's getting up there.

To be honest with you, just given the budget debates and everything else that's going on – I've got four other portfolios that I'm looking after right now – I haven't had time to read the whole bill, which is what I would usually do.

A couple of things. I'm sure all of us have started to get people e-mailing us. I'm always interested in why people from totally other parts of Alberta would e-mail me and want me to do things, but okay. One of the things that started to occur to me was the number of times people were talking about rights: "It's my right to do this. It's my right to do that." As someone who has studied the Constitution, when I hear that, "It's my right to," I always go back to the document that actually confers rights, and that would be the Constitution of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

When you go through the Constitution, it confers freedoms, first of all, but the freedoms are subject. Right before we even get into it, it says, "guarantees the rights and freedoms . . . subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." So right there, right off the bat, the first thing, right at the top it says that there are limits to this. You don't get to swing your fist around no matter what's in your way. We put limits on these things right from the get-go, and they should be reasonable limits, obviously. Freedoms, rights – and there definitely are rights here. They're laid out; they're very clear.

But protections are also offered; for example, things like the equality section that we find in section 15. That's generally referred to as an equality rights section, but it does lay it out – and I'm just going to quote from it here – that people have “the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on,” and then it begins a long list. That's an example of protections that are offered as part of what we get out of this package. So freedoms, rights, protections, and privileges.

Privileges are what we extend as a sort of subsection out of a freedom or a right. A privilege is something that is granted and can be taken away. It's not something that you automatically get. It's not something that you can take to court and demand that somebody give to you. The presiding authority may grant it. The most common one here is drivers' licences. Nobody has a right to drive a car or to drive any kind of a vehicle here in Alberta. There is a process. There's a licensing process. There's a testing process that is set out by the province, who says, “Okay. Here is who we say can legally drive on our streets, and here is the way we're going to test them, and you have to pay a fee, and you've got to have insurance,” and there are all kinds of other things that are set out around that privilege. But it's a privilege; it's not a right.

There are also accommodations. Again, those accommodations are granted by an authority, whichever is the appropriate authority, that says things like, you know: “Here are the rules and the way we want things, but we recognize that that doesn't work for everybody, and we will offer an accommodation.” We will say: “That's okay. You can come and do this, and here's how we'll make it possible for you.” It's an accommodation. They want to bring a group in for some reason, so they will bend the rules or allow another rule that would accommodate a particular group.

Where you often see that is in building codes, for example. There are certain requirements of it, and then in accommodation of people who have mobility barriers there would be ramps and the doors that, you know, you hit the button and the doors open and that sort of thing. We're accommodating certain groups so that we can include them and have them with us in the building.

Now, all of those things go under one heading and are balanced by something on the other side, which is responsibility. So, yes, there are freedoms, there are rights, there are protections, privileges, and accommodations, and it's balanced by responsibility. That's an important part of what we do because it does say: “This is the give-and-take. This is the yin and the yang. We will do these things for you. We will pay for your public education, but you have a responsibility to show up and try and learn. It doesn't mean you have to be brilliant, but you've got to show up and try and learn.”

3:40

New in this education bill is the responsibility of students to do that and a code of conduct. I think, actually, that's a good addition to what we're doing here because it means it's quantifiable. It means that it's very clear what is expected of students. It's a way of measuring what they do. The students are clear, and the other people that deal with them are clear.

This is where it gets complicated. The other things that we have in, if I may say, the mix of offering education – and part of this hearkens back to education under section 93 of the Constitution. “In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education, subject and according to the following Provisions,” and they set out there a list and a minority list. It uses language like “at the Union,” in other words at the union of the provinces at the time, and the BNA Act is what it's referring back to. What we have mentioned specifically are

Protestant schools, Catholic schools, and then we talk about minority schools.

If the Protestant school is the majority school, the Catholic system is the minority school. It protects minority rights there, and it spells it out very clearly in the Constitution and in the Charter and in your bill. We also specifically mention in the Constitution and in the Charter English and French languages, and again the minority of that. So if there is primarily English spoken, we have guarantees of protection for the minority language speakers, the French, again subject to limitations. The limitation that is spelled out in the Constitution, which I'm not going to find at my fingertips here, is essentially the number of students, and it spells that out fairly clearly. It does use language like: subject to the number of students. There's one other phrase that it uses there.

Okay. Those are the ones that are constitutionally protected. The language, the religions – and the religions, interestingly enough, are spelled out, and in that they're a little archaic in this day and age because there are far more religions that are in our society than Protestant and Catholic. Even inside of the catchphrase “Protestant” there are a lot of other particular sects that identify themselves very distinctly.

But this doesn't include Hindus, Baha'i, Muslims. I'm sorry; I'm going to get myself in trouble here because I don't have the whole long list in front of me. This is getting us in an interesting position in this day and age because at one point someone was a proponent of getting rid of the Catholic school board and it should just all be Protestant, but that doesn't include all of these other religions that are not Protestant. That seems to have not gotten its way into this bill, and for that I thank you. We know which ones are specifically mentioned in the Constitution and the Charter and protected there: Protestant, Catholic, English and French languages.

If you're equating with me and following along on my list, now we get into the accommodations and the privileges, and those are private schools, home-schooling, distance schooling, and, new in this bill, First Nations accommodation, Métis settlement accommodation in schools, and one more – I grew up really close to it – that has always been a part of this, and at one time the school was the personal responsibility of the Minister of Education of the day, the School for the Deaf.

So those are accommodations. Nowhere is there a constitutional right to home-schooling. Nowhere is there a constitutional or Charter right to a Métis settlement school. Nowhere in the Constitution or the Charter is there a right to distance learning or to home-schooling or to private schools. Those are accommodations that the province has seen in its authority to be able to say: “We will allow this. We will offer it.” We have to keep that in mind as we go through the rest of this act, and I'm assuming it's going to take us awhile to debate our way through here.

Anybody who wants to write to me now, I hope you read what I just said because I'm kind of sticky about this stuff. Don't come at me talking about your right to something unless you're going to be able to have read that Constitution before. Thank you so much.

There's a long list of things that are in here and not in here, and I look forward to continued debate on that. Some of the new things that are in here I'm happy to see were some of the things that the trustees were asking for like the personal power, power of the person, the legal thing that allows them to make decisions about stuff.

There are a couple of things in here. I've got a couple of minutes left. This is not a shell bill. Again, I refer to the weight of the thing. Yeah. It's about the same as my smallest cat. So, you know, there's some heft to this one. It's coming in at 200 pages,

close to 200 pages. It's not a shell bill. It's not just, you know: this is the act and everything else comes under the minister. But it's close. There's a lot, a lot of stuff that is now deferred to the minister.

Why do I have problems with that? I have problems with it because he does not come back in front of the people. It does not come back in front of the Legislature for debate. The people may never know until it's a done deal. They may not have the opportunity for consultation. They may not have the opportunity to find out that there is something under consideration by the minister. It's just going to be done and announced because the minister may make regulations, and there is no requirement that regulations come before this House. I always have trouble with that, and I am right to have trouble with that because there are too many examples of where government has made those regulations – and that awful cliché – behind closed doors and out of the view of the people. But that's what happens, and I'm always going to rail against that.

The second part of what's going on here is the language. The specificity of language is very important to me. Some words that I have learned from this government to be very cautious about: choice, option, flexibility, partnership, responsibility. Those words have taken on an entirely new meaning in many cases under this government. Choice with seniors' programs back 10, 12 years ago became no choice. An option, no, was no option. Responsibility meant: you're on your own, toots. Partnership often meant delegated to you; it's all your problem now. The one partner is responsible for everything. Responsibility. Now, I started by talking about responsibility, and I think it's important. I know I'm going to run out of time here.

In second reading I am willing to support what I hope is a good intent in this bill, but I really look forward to Committee of the Whole to dig down on it. Thank you very much.

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

Section 29(2)(a) is available should you wish to question the previous speaker or comment on her speech. The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I certainly was listening with interest to your remarks regarding Bill 2, and I have a couple of questions for you in the time allowed. My first question is regarding section 177 on page 122, authorization to levy and collect taxes. Some time ago the Progressive Conservatives removed the right of democratically elected school boards to tax. How do you feel about that? Do you feel that perhaps now is the ideal time under this bill to perhaps correct that Conservative wrong and allow school boards to again collect taxes as they see fit and as the voters see fit as well?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

3:50

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thanks very much, Member for Edmonton-Gold-Bar. I have spoken about this publicly before, and I believe it. I think that it is appropriate that school boards are able to requisition money to pay for what they're doing, and I think it should be locally based. A number of years ago – must be close to 20 now – under the leadership of then Premier Klein the decision was that it wasn't fair. They just weren't getting the resources that they needed, so the government was going to collect all the money, put it into general revenue, and then redistribute, and I've got little air quotes around redistribute.

So we watched to see if it did kind of even out across the

province, and I would say that that has not been a successful experiment. As a matter of fact, the schools that were doing okay, usually in urban areas, are now doing not so okay as their money is taken and used to subsidize schools in other parts of the province. I don't believe in that.

All this time I get my beloved Conservatives on the other side – I just want to ruffle your hair a little bit, darling things that you are. For all the talk that I hear about so often, you know, "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" and "Do your own thing" and "You're responsible, blah, blah, blah" – okay. But when it comes to schooling, no, you guys are going to take the money, and they are going to have to live with what's left. I just don't agree with it. I think that schools should be able to requisition the funds that they need to do what they need to do, and they will be immediately responsive to the people they are serving, which is their local school board.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Now, section 62 of the bill, closure of schools. You didn't have an opportunity to discuss this very important issue. You come from a central neighbourhood of Edmonton. All central neighbourhoods, older established neighbourhoods have had issues in the past with school closures. Would you like to see more warning written directly into this act for communities who are under threat of a school closure from a school board? Would you like to see more rules to give citizens an opportunity to perhaps improve enrolment in their local school before it is closed? Do you think this allows the school boards to act too quickly to close schools is what I'm trying to say.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: I think there needs to be enough time for the local community to get organized. Too much time and people go: "Oh, that's not happening right now. I don't have to worry about it. That's next year." So there is a sort of happy medium there.

As someone who has had a school close, I can tell you that it is devastation. I have a community that has never recovered from having its K to 6 school closed. It is literally a black hole in the community. The lights are off. The school ground is dark. The playground that I helped raised money to build when I was first elected – it was built the very first summer I was elected – is a hangout for drug dealers and people up to no good, as my grandmother would say. It devastated us. Even people in the community that don't have kids were involved in those kids' lives. They saw them walk by every day. They went to the Christmas concerts. They saw the kids in their Halloween outfits. They were connected to those children. They knew who they were, and they looked after them. When the kid was going by with a bloody nose and crying, they came out and said: "Hey, I've seen you before, kid. What can I do to help you? Can I phone your mom?"

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on my list next, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak on Bill 2 at this late point on a Thursday afternoon. This is a bill that has been, you know, long coming. I believe that the previous minister commenced the excessive consultation and discussion and inspirational group settings process about three and a half or four years ago. We had Inspiring Education; Setting the Direction for Special Education; Speak Out, the student engagement initiative; and Inspiring Action on Education, which all took place before the previous version of this bill was introduced last year.

We understood that because of the timing with respect to the

leadership selection process of the Conservative Party there probably wouldn't be enough time in the Legislature to get this bill passed. So we weren't, of course, at all surprised to hear that it would be retabled subsequently. What was interesting, though, was that we decided not to retable it last fall. At that time the minister suggested that, you know, we hadn't done enough consultation, which I thought was quite confusing. Really, I don't know that there's a piece of legislation that hadn't engaged or involved discussion, not necessarily consensus or support, but certainly there had been tremendous amounts of discussion with the public around this piece of legislation or around sort of the precursor to it.

I think that the process from having the very large, big-picture conversations that took place at the various and sundry consultation efforts and then the translation of that to an actual act was maybe less transparent because I think, unfortunately, that a lot of the people that were involved in sort of the big-picture, visionary statements that were agreed to and through the Inspiring Education process, for instance, didn't really understand what that would look like in the course of an act. We didn't really have as much consultation with citizens around that process of translating and how you take big-picture vision A and then link it up to where you see it reflected in the act.

Nonetheless, the current minister then decided that we needed to have more consultation. Really, quite frankly, you know, we've had lots of conversation about how this government has been using Public Affairs Bureau money to essentially engage in pre-election campaigning. From sort of late last fall up until now that's really how I've interpreted much of the outreach and bonding with school councils and more advertising and more consultation that's gone on under this minister, essentially a form of pre-election advertising in an attempt to characterize this government, which has so significantly dropped the ball on education over the last two years, as in fact being a government that is sympathetic to and cares about education.

Now, I don't know that most people really bought it, but certainly there's no question that the current minister engaged in a plethora of media events with a number of children at his side in an effort to maximize the photo opportunities in the pre-election period. As a result, we are now having this conversation at this later date.

Having said that, let's talk a little bit about the bill itself. There are a few things in the bill which I think are reasonable steps forward which a lot of people had been looking for. School boards, I know, had spent a lot of time looking for natural person powers. I think the idea of defining the roles and responsibilities of students, parents, school boards, and trustees is certainly never bad. I think the idea of establishing student advisory councils is a good thing.

I think the fact that the school boards can appoint a superintendent without the prior approval of the Minister of Education is an excellent step forward, quite frankly, because I think there was some discomfort in certain settings of the relationship between superintendents and ministry staff in the past.

Ms Blakeman: But they can appoint trustees.

Ms Notley: Indeed, the Member for Edmonton-Centre points out that this bill allows them to appoint trustees, but I think they would argue that they already sort of had the authority under the old act to fire elected boards.

They continue to maintain a great deal of control in this act. But I guess I would say that on a day-to-day basis the slightly greater independence of the superintendents is not a bad thing.

Having said that, I think there are a number of things included in this bill which I am concerned about, and I'll try and list them off within the 10 minutes that I'm allowed. I'm allowed 15 minutes? Okay. Well, that's good.

The first thing is that the new act has removed the previously existing requirements related to the transportation of students and, in fact, the whole issue around the 2.4 kilometre walk distance. I know that's a very complex issue, and it does relate to financing and funding, but I'm a little worried about what the long-term implications for that issue are in terms of the issue that the previous members were discussing around school closures in community schools as well as the issue of funded transportation for our students.

Another issue that the previous members were talking about that I think is really important to talk about that's not included in this bill is the issue of how we deal with the relationship between the Ministry of Education, the community, the school boards which represent the community, the municipalities, and other arms of the government that engage in municipal planning and land-use planning.

4:00

In fact, what has happened is that this ministry has retreated to a silo form of conversation, which they use to deflect responsibility and accountability for the hollowing out that is going on within our urban communities as a result of school closures. To say, "Well, it's not my file; it's their file," and "It's not my responsibility; it's their responsibility," is profoundly short sighted. It crosses a number of different ministries as well as different levels of government.

I would have liked to have seen an Education Act that was forward looking and reflected an understanding of the critical importance that schools play in our communities as well as in our general urban development, something that needs to be shifted away from the hapless, anything goes, whatever the developer wants, urban sprawl, whatever happens happens kind of process that we have in place right now. Schools are a fundamental part of that.

The previous member talked about what happens when a school closes in a community, and certainly I've been involved in a number of campaigns in that regard. I really do believe that so many things are linked to the existence of the community school, and the failure of this act to even turn its mind to that issue in any fashion I think shows a continued form of inward, defensive, "it's somebody else's problem" type of thinking.

I'm concerned as well about the way this act treats charter schools. I believe that this is the first step towards sort of a continued Americanization of our education system. I understand that charter schools are publicly funded, but at the end of the day what we need to ensure is that our public school boards have the capacity to make decisions which are best for the communities. What's happened in this bill which raises a number of concerns for me is that we have significantly expanded the opportunities for charter schools, and in so doing, we're undercutting the role and the ability of school boards to make decisions around allocation of resources. What we will do is undercut the community school, something which I just talked about as being very, very important.

Currently in the absence of this bill school boards retain the right of first refusal when an application is made for a charter school. So if people go to the minister and say, "I want a charter school because this particular educational need is not being met in my community or is not being met anywhere," the school board has the opportunity to consider whether they are going to provide that type of education within their structure. If they don't provide

it, then in theory the minister has the discretion to go forward and consider the introduction of a charter school. What's happening now, though, is that the school board no longer has that right of first refusal, so that's a problem.

The other thing that happens is that the charter schools then move away from their original focus as centres of innovation, and they simply turn into sort of competitors with the school board.

Another thing. The current act requires that charter schools have significant support from the community in which it is to be located. This new act will no longer suggest that there needs to be community support.

Just to be clear, charter schools do not have the obligation to accept everyone that comes to them. They get to pick and choose who they accept. They become havens of elitism because they get to pick and choose who they select. Maybe in some cases that's appropriate. It depends on the nature of what's being taught and the circumstances around why that was necessary. But those parameters are no longer included in the act.

The additional problem is that the current act contains a provision which suggests that the charter school established by the minister must restrict its purpose to the operations of that charter school. Well, that's being removed, so now what can happen is that Microsoft can create an IT charter school, and the minister can go behind closed doors to approve it because, of course, we're moving all the criteria into regulation. Then what happens is that their primary purpose is no longer to operate the school. It's the school, but they're also Microsoft. Then suddenly we have a marketing opportunity for a computer company, for instance. Currently the act would not allow that, but with the changes under this act, that could happen. So those are my concerns around the charter schools.

Fees. The act does nothing to deal with prohibiting school fees, which are a growing challenge and problem for many of our families throughout Alberta. The sort of vague promise of the minister to deal with it in the future is basically: talk to me after the election; we'll see what happens. You know what? As I've said, I outlined four and a half years of consultation and discussion that preceded this act, and you're saying that we couldn't have somehow got school fees included and addressed in this act, that now we have to do another set of studies and another round of consultation? Come on. It should be in there, and it's not.

Bullying. Of course, this minister has spent a lot of time talking about: well, we're putting in prohibitions on bullying. He's really patting himself on the back and making all these motherhood and apple pie statements about bullying. That's great. We all like motherhood and apple pie statements about bullying. But it really comes down to where the rubber hits the road.

Any educational professional will tell you that the way you limit bullying in the school system is that you have enough teachers and support staff there to provide structured programming – structured recess programming, structured noon-hour programming, whether it be intramurals or some kind of computer geek class or performing arts or whatever – stuff for kids to do at those key times when bullying is a problem. For instance, this year we've got roughly 500 fewer teachers than we had last year. If you maintain that situation so that the teachers are running around like chickens with their heads cut off and can barely see what's going on in the hallways, on the school grounds, or between classes, well, that's when bullying happens.

If you really care about bullying, you will properly resource your schools so that the staff there can do that work that's necessary to create the environment that prevents it. But that's not what this government is doing. They're doing what they always do. They're patting themselves on the back. They're making grand

statements and gestures, but they're doing absolutely nothing to follow up with it. That's an unfortunate failure.

Full-day kindergarten. The Premier promised it when she ran. It's not talked about in this act. We have no commitment for it going forward. It's not in the budget. It's not there. Again, it should have been in the act. We've been talking about this for four years. Why isn't it there?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, longer than that.

Ms Notley: Well, we've been talking about kindergarten for a decade, but the consultation process that preceded this act would have been about four years.

Those are a few things. I have, I think, about a minute left.

The final thing that I haven't had a chance to really talk too much about but which really matters a great deal to me is that we have a fundamental problem in our school system with respect to how we are dealing with special-needs students. The setting the direction plan and now inclusive education is a recipe for profound failure on the part of our school system, and it's going to create many, many problems. I've raised this issue in a number of different sectors. Teachers know it; support staff know it. The fact of the matter is that this act does nothing to prevent this government from moving forward with a strategy which is going to be the equivalent of what we did to people with mental health issues in the early '70s. We're going to be cutting them loose in the classrooms, no accountability, no training for providing the appropriate kind of specialized support for these kids. They're going to get lost in the classrooms, and the overall quality of education is going to suffer.

This act allows that to happen, and it's a real problem.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for questioning or comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Two things. I'd like to ask the member if she would just flesh that out a little bit. I'm wondering specifically what she's trying to get at, whether it's regulations or funding, around special-needs students. That also includes gifted students, by the way.

Secondly, I wonder if she was aware that Mike Strembitsky, when he was the superintendent of the Edmonton public school board, said that charter schools are fine, but they have to be in the public system, in the schools under the public system. That is the system that I grew up with, and it seems to me it worked a lot better. I had no idea that outside of Edmonton charter schools were on their own and were essentially private schools.

I'm wondering if the member could cover those two topics.

4:10

Ms Notley: I'll try and deal quickly with the charter schools. I think that charter schools can work and do work in controlled situations, in situations where they're working collaboratively within the context of what the school board is doing in that situation and are providing that type of expert curriculum or focused curriculum that can be sort of linked up appropriately within the overall public school board. I'm afraid that with the criteria going behind closed doors and being opened up, we're not going to get that and that there's nothing now to stop them from being these sort of competition-type scenarios. I won't get into a huge amount of discussion because I want to answer the other question.

The concern around special needs is not – we talk about inclusion. Inclusion is fundamental, and it's really important. In

order to ensure inclusion, you need to start from the perspective that each special-needs child is going to require a separately developed and assessed curriculum, that may well take them to the very same place that every other typical child is going to. But the skill set for doing that is very different from what 95 per cent of teachers have learned when they got their education, and most teachers will admit that to you quite handily. Moreover, they're not trained on assessing the type of special needs, and they're not trained in curriculum development for special needs.

What we've got right now, where we're going, Mr. Speaker, is that we're just going to download that responsibility onto teachers, and we think that if we give them one online course and a weekend seminar, suddenly they're going to know how to do this. The best teachers know that, in fact, they probably need a good eight months to a year of additional training if they're going to take on that role, which is now being downloaded onto them.

What we're seeing in the classroom now because we're taking away the issue of coding and we're no longer attaching funding on the basis of disability, is that you have a teacher in a classroom who doesn't know how to assess situations. They'll have six or seven special-needs children. They don't know how to assess the severity of each one. They don't know how to manage the curriculum for each one. They don't even know how to manage the behaviour for each one, which, by the way, is not the primary task of the teacher. That's a secondary task. It's still about teaching and curriculum. It's not about behaviour management.

What happens then is that the class just starts to fall apart. People who have been teaching in that context over the last year, year and a half, two years – of course, it's been growing because this government has frozen special-needs funding over four years, and even the funding that went in this year barely catches us up to where we were in 2008. Since most of that is going to creating this

whole new process that the government has developed, it's not going to the kids in the classroom.

With that being said, we've seen it evolve over the last four years that the quality of special-needs education is deteriorating dramatically, as is the experience of the other kids in the classroom. You know, the ATA put out a poll about a month ago saying that the number of teachers who believe that special-needs education has dramatically deteriorated has gone from 25 per cent to 50 per cent over the last four years. There is a reason for that, Mr. Speaker.

I grant that not all of that can be addressed in the act, but what the act doesn't do is stop what this government is doing. It doesn't provide enough clarity for the rights of special-needs children, for special-needs children to know that they have a right to get the support they need, to get the education they need, and that includes having people in their classroom who are trained to provide them with the support they need in that classroom.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. That concludes 29(2)(a).

Are there any other speakers to Bill 2, the Education Act, at this time? None?

I will then invite the hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all the members for this illuminating debate, and I would now ask for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, given the time I would propose that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 12, please.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:15 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

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

Activity to March 08, 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)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 5 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 5, 2012; SA 2012 cR-17.5]

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.), 256-57 (Feb. 22 aft.), 405-11 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

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)

Third Reading -- 251-56 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 5 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 5, 2012; SA 2012 c1]

4 St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act (Lukaszuk)

First Reading -- 236 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 403-04 (Mar. 8 aft., adjourned)

5 Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act (Jablonski)

First Reading -- 298 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 403 (Mar. 8 aft., adjourned)

6 Property Rights Advocate Act (McQueen)

First Reading -- 236 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 404-05 (Mar. 8 aft., adjourned)

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

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

Second Reading -- 299-311 (Mar. 5 aft., defeated on division)

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

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

204 Land Statutes (Abolition of Adverse Possession) Amendment Act, 2012 (Allred)

First Reading -- 357 (Mar. 7 aft., passed)

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