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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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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 12, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. As our members gather to begin a new week in our Assembly, we are reminded of the blessings which have been bestowed upon Alberta, and we give thanks for this bounty. May we conduct ourselves in our deliberations in ways that honour our province and all of its people. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

All hon. members will have on their desks a Commonwealth Day message from Her Majesty the Queen, Head of the Commonwealth.

Man in Motion 25th Anniversary Relay Mr. Rick Hansen's Address to the Assembly

The Speaker: At this point I would ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to open the main entrance doors of the Assembly pursuant to Motion 11, which was approved by this Assembly last week.

[Mr. Rick Hansen entered the Chamber and took his place at the bar] [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this day is of particular significance as it is the second time in our history that Mr. Rick Hansen has spoken from the Chamber floor. On May 8, 1997, Mr. Hansen addressed the members from the floor of the Legislative Assembly. He is the only individual in the 107-year history of this Assembly to have been invited twice to speak to the members.

Mr. Hansen is an exceptional individual who is committed to motivating people to recognize their dreams and to turn them into reality. Twenty-five years ago Rick Hansen established his Man in Motion tour across the globe. For 26 months he and his team wheeled over 40,000 kilometres through 34 countries, raising awareness for spinal cord research.

The Rick Hansen 25th Anniversary Relay is retracing the Canadian segment of the original Man in Motion World Tour. The relay, which started August 24, 2011, in Cape Spear, Newfoundland and Labrador, is travelling westward to British Columbia. The nine-month relay will cover 12,000 kilometres and visit over 600 communities in every province and territory of our great country. Today we invite Mr. Hansen to make a stop on the tour, to join us, and to say hello.

Mr. Hansen, welcome again to the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Would you please come forward. [applause]

[Mr. Hansen proceeded to the head of the table]

Mr. Hansen: Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Sir, the floor is yours. Don't worry about me.

Mr. Hansen: I hate to turn my back to such a distinguished Speaker.

[The Speaker left the chair and took a place on the floor of the Assembly]

Mr. Hansen: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you so much for this incredible honour.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is an incredible honour to be here to present to you an ongoing journey, a vision, values of this country. I feel so privileged to have been a young kid growing up in rural Canada who had a devastating accident that seemed to have shattered hopes and dreams. It was the values and the spirit of this country, family, friends, community, the medical profession, and role models all working together to help me rebuild my life, to have hopes and dreams, to be able to then look back and think about what I could do to make a difference, to pay it forward to the lives of others. It spawned the Man in Motion tour, to be able to find a cure for spinal cord injury, to make the world more accessible and inclusive for the hundreds of millions of people with disabilities just waiting for the opportunity to express themselves, to be welcome in families, in homes, and in communities.

All those years wheeling across the country and around the world were a tremendous experience. You know, I felt so buoyed because I was looked up to as a Canadian no matter where I went in the world. I felt proud of our values and what we stand for. I also was incredibly inspired when I came across this country in the middle of winter, facing insurmountable odds and obstacles, to see the wellspring of support from local citizens everywhere, people lining the streets, joining with me in a conversation about what this country aspires to be: a healthy and inclusive place for all, a country that also takes its rightful role in the world in leadership, in friendship, and in common spirit.

I'll never forget the incredible response that I received when the Premier met me at the border here in Alberta and welcomed me to this great province, the incredible support here at the Legislature, in universities, in high schools, in hospitals and rehab centres, and on the streets every single day, making me feel like that road wasn't long and lonely but that it was surrounded by family and friends, one country united with one common purpose.

When I completed the Man in Motion tour in May of 1987, I crossed a finish line that said, "Welcome Home, Rick," and above it there was a sign that said, "The End Is Just the Beginning." Well, you can imagine what I must have thought at that point, after having gone through all those miles and all those incredible challenges. In reality, the tour was over, but the dream had just begun.

It was a new conversation with our country, and millions of people picked up that cause and translated it into their own purpose and translated it into real change year in and year out, making fundamental progress towards a cure for spinal cord injury and accessible and inclusive communities. You know, it's hard to measure those profound moments of change in one year, but after 25 years, looking back, there is so much to be proud of, so much to celebrate. This is why we decided to conduct the 25th anniversary relay, going back to places all around the world and, of course, right across this great country, to be able to recognize local champions, to move from one man in motion to many, to make

this a nation's journey, to continue to move forward for the next 25 years until we get to the goal.

I feel so privileged to be doing this cross-Canada relay and joining 7,000 difference-makers who have been with me and so many others for all these years, to recognize the spirit of Albertans, to see close to a thousand Albertans actually out there on the relay, each one of them having their own amazing story.

Of course, here in the gallery we have two amazing difference-makers that I'd like to recognize, Amanda Magyar and Benjamin Tumack. If you could stand up and be recognized. Amanda, you are an incredible difference-maker. You are someone who has set goals and chased dreams. You exercise leadership and self-esteem amongst young people. But you also believe in a healthy planet, and you're continuing to exercise stewardship of this great Earth here locally and inspiring others around the world.

1:40

Of course, Benjamin, I'd like you to stand up because you've also overcome many obstacles yourself from a physical disability, but we don't see disability in your attitude and spirit; we see only ability. You not only translate and overcome your obstacles with muscular dystrophy in so many amazing ways to make a difference, but you have aspirations of representing your country as an elite wheelchair basketball player in the juniors and also dreams of the Paralympic Games to make all Albertans proud.

You are the representation of 850 Albertans who have been part of this relay. I'd like to ask Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in recognizing you and saying thank you and congratulations. We are proud of you.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, we have come a long way, and there is much to celebrate. I'd like to say a special thank you to the members here in this Legislature. Each and every one of you is making a difference. You have stepped up to serve your constituencies, your province well. You're making change. You have been partners with us for all these years to make sure that Alberta has a world-class research organization with universities and hospitals, finding a cure and connecting with the world. You've made sure that your communities are accessible and inclusive for all, and you see it reflected here in this Legislature, with people who happen to have disabilities but are expressing ability in an inclusive way. These examples of success are worthy.

We appreciate your partnership. We look forward to the next 25 years together. It's going to be a fantastic, accelerating contribution that we all make. I'd like to say thank you so much for being part of my dreams, helping me to feel like our best work is in front of us. I look forward to one year at a time, one stroke at a time, one contribution at a time until we get to that end. Thank you so much, and never give up on your dreams. I really appreciate it.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

[Mr. Hansen left the Chamber]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today after that wonderful speech and take a moment just to introduce some very, very special guests we have with us today. Our guests are accompanying Mr. Rick Hansen, who has come to Edmonton as part of his 25th anniversary relay. In your gallery today we have Amanda Magyar, who is

participating in the Rick Hansen relay, and her sister Kassandra Magyar. We have Benjamin Tumack, who is also participating in the Rick Hansen relay, along with his mom and dad, Terri and Ken Tumack, as well as the following staff members from the Rick Hansen Foundation: Jamie Levchuk, Pamela Berg, Nadine Jarry, Colin Ewart, John Gibson, Doramy Ehling, and Christine Myatt. As they join us in the Alberta Legislature today, their presence reminds us that Rick's journey and his message of hope are as relevant today as they were 25 years ago. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm greetings of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a bright and enthusiastic group of 35 grade 6 students from Brookside elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here this week for School at the Legislature. I saw them very briefly earlier today. It looks like they're enjoying the opportunity immensely. Accompanying the students are their teachers Shirley Szeto and Tara Price and parents Kym Schreiner and Sharon Gritter.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that in recognition of Commonwealth Day these students were representing various foreign diplomats of the Commonwealth. In speaking with the students, I know they're going to have some wonderful questions for me when we get together later on in the week. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a real treat for me today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly students from Lynnwood school. There are 44 of them here today. Lynnwood school is a terrific school. I always enjoy going there to read during Read In Week, and I hope to be back not long from now to speak to the grade 6 class, at least, about the Legislature. The students are accompanied by a couple of teachers, Ms Adamson Cavanaugh and Mrs. Afreen, and they have two parent helpers with them, Mr. Pascoe and Mrs. Boucher. I would ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, your guests will arrive later?

Mr. Benito: No.

The Speaker: They're here? Go ahead.

Mr. Benito: I have two introductions today, Mr. Speaker. Both of them are in the public gallery. On the date of March 4 four migrant workers from the Philippines are dead after a head-on collision in southern Alberta that police believe was the result of drunk driving. Two men, both 35, and two women, aged 52 and 39, were killed. The loss of Anthony Castillon, Joey Mangonon, Eden Biazon, and Josefina Velarde has left the Filipino community of Alberta heartbroken and in a period of mourning. Mandy Servito, our guest for today, president of CEFA, or the Council of Edmonton Filipino Associations, is leading the way in providing comfort and support to those who have been greatly affected by this devastating incident. As well, Mandy, through

CEFA and in co-ordination with the workers' employers and all Albertans, is standing behind Josephine Tamondong, the lone survivor, through this difficult time. I would ask Mandy to stand and receive the traditional recognition of this Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Ms Julie Kallal, media relations of the Council of Edmonton Filipino Associations, or CEFA. Through the leadership role of CEFA and the good media works of Ms Kallal the awareness and help from the community for the victims of the tragic accident of March 4 that killed four migrant workers from the Philippines is in full swing. More help is needed. The umbrella group of 24 Filipino associations is very appreciative and commending the full support of the media for this tragic accident. I would now ask Ms Kallal to stand up and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two important people in my life. Seated in your gallery are my father, Mr. Alvin Berger, from Nanton, Alberta, who at 89 years young still goes out to his shop and works on machinery every day, and my brother-in-law, Mr. Reid McPherson, who farms near Ardrossan. I would like the Assembly to please show them the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a family who travelled from Beauvallon in my constituency today for a tour of the Legislature Building and to watch question period. Marianne and her husband, Ross Amy, are here with their four children: Heather, Stephen, Sara, and David. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two constituents and close friends of mine, Arlene and Murray Barker. I believe they're seated in the public gallery near the entrance. Murray is a retired detective from the Edmonton police force, but he has been on disability for 15 years now as a result of his contracting multiple sclerosis. Murray is very interested in the CCSVI treatment, but because of his size and his disability it is virtually impossible for him to travel to the United States for treatment. Nevertheless, Murray is a very positive force in St. Albert, scooting about town in his motorized wheelchair no matter what the weather conditions are. Murray will be a participant in the Rick Hansen relay on Wednesday, enthusiastically carrying the Rick Hansen medal with pride in St. Albert. He is another difference-maker. I would ask Arlene to rise and ask members of the Assembly to give Murray and Arlene the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta's Representative in Asia

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome the Premier back to Canada. Lately as the PCs lurch from one scandal to another, the Premier has found a new hobby, throwing people under the campaign bus: the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, Shiraz Shariff, and now Gary Mar. I wonder who the next member of the under the campaign bus club will be. To the Premier: were there any other government officials or government MLAs involved in organizing this fundraiser or in donating prizes for the silent auction, and if so, will you please explain?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was certainly pleased to be welcomed back to the province by the hon. member. Our trip to Washington and New York last week was terribly successful – invited by FirstEnergy to speak at the East Coast Energy Conference to talk about the future of Alberta – well received, very optimistic, and pretty excited about what a good long-term fiscal plan looks like for this province.

With respect to a specific answer to the question of the hon. member if there is anyone who exhibits inappropriate behaviour that does not meet a code of values and ethics that matter to this government, then we will ask them to take responsibility for their actions, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier promised change, real change, and first she ripped into Gar Mar during the PC leadership race for his connection to Kelley Charlebois, famous for receiving a two-year \$400,000 PC government contract to do nothing – Premier, you promised change – will the Premier please explain why she exercised such poor judgment in giving Mr. Mar a plum patronage post mere days after the leadership race was over and putting Kelley Charlebois in charge of the PC Party?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the future of this province will be opening markets, and we have had people in this province who've been public servants, who've done a very good job of doing that, and it's important for us to ensure that we can gather all of the talent possible. Now, there's no doubt – and I said it on Friday – that I have particular concerns about the information that was presented to me on Friday. We acted on it immediately. That matter is with the Ethics Commissioner, and that's where it should be.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is absolutely correct. Trade is so important.

A patronage position, a suspension of our representative, and our reputation yet again tarnished. To the Premier: given that accounts that that trip to Hong Kong was one of the fundraiser auction prizes and that it may have included a promise that Mr. Mar would show the winner around the city and make introductions to leaders, can the Premier say with certainty today whether or not this is true? Did a government representative attempt to profit from his office and his manner to pay his campaign debt?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the comments that the hon. member has made are at this point speculative. Now, I'm not going to say whether they are true or not true. That's why, I think by 2:30 on Friday afternoon, within an hour of hearing what had happened, I

asked the Ethics Commissioner to look at that. If this did happen, there is no doubt that it is inappropriate. I've expressed my concern, and we need to ensure that there is due process with respect to this matter.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What was inappropriate was making that appointment in the first place.

Long-term Care for Seniors

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, before the last election, in 2008, a near crisis caused by the warehousing of seniors was making the news. How little things have changed. Back then the PCs promised to solve the problem by adding hundreds of new long-term care beds to free up beds and eliminate ER waits in the process, and the previous Premier put his name to this. Now, the headlines are the same today as they were in 2008, and today we actually have fewer long-term care beds than we had back then. To the Premier. You're not even building long-term care beds, except 30 of them and a whole bunch of for-profit beds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. [interjection] The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that there are more long-term care beds, there are more seniors in housing, there is strong, affordable public health care for seniors, and we have put in place plans to continue that program. We have had tremendous success. The only reason that the headlines might look similar today as they did four years ago is because, as we know, we are very close to an election, and there are a number of political parties that think that they can scare seniors into not supporting government, and that's shameful.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only one scaring the seniors and making them involuntarily separate and lifting the cap is you, Premier.

Given that the Premier spoke glowingly of privatizing the delivery of seniors' care, saying, "Allowing private industry to meet seniors' needs will create more jobs in many different sectors and steady growth for our economy," when will this Premier stop selling out our seniors and follow the Alberta Liberal lead by building publicly delivered, nonprofit, long-term care? Premier, our seniors are not commodities to be sold to your buddies.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this government hasn't built only hundreds of continuing care spaces for seniors; we have built thousands in the last few years. We are on track to meet our goal of 5,300 spaces over five years. Unlike the opposition, that would prefer to warehouse seniors, apparently, in nursing homes of the 1970s, we intend to continue our plan to expand affordable services for seniors and bring health care to them in place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pot calling the kettle black, the guy who wrecked this whole health system to begin with.

To the Premier. Given that the case of Audry Chudyk made it very clear that this current government does not adequately staff

or resource seniors' facilities already in place, resulting in such cases of severe senior neglect, could you please tell this House how you plan to upgrade the level of care and service in both existing and new long-term care facilities so that no senior ever suffers the shameful neglect Audry Chudyk did? How are you going to do it by reducing the level of care?

Ms Redford: A perfect example of what I've just been talking about, the hon. member standing up and using an unfortunate circumstance to scare seniors across this province. It is not appropriate. I am surely shocked that this is how we would have this conversation. I will go back, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that we are committed to publicly funded health care for seniors in appropriate accommodation that allows people to have choices and stay together. There is no doubt that the minister of health is correct. We have built thousands of new spaces, and we'll continue to do so.

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

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Hehr: The Alberta First Nations Energy Centre project, an upgrader to refine our bitumen here at home that would have led to the first refinery to be built in North America in decades, has been shelved by this government. Crazy, given that this project would have also connected us to Asian markets by using already established pipeline routes. Furthermore, government bureaucrats, cabinet ministers, the former Premier, and the Prime Minister's office were all enthusiastic about this project. To the Premier: how come your government has shelved this project that would have brought \$110 billion into our economy?

Ms Redford: There are a number of projects that come forward to the provincial government and through the private sector to private investors that might make sense. Our job as the government has to be to ensure that we are spending taxpayers' money wisely. Although I know there was a lot of enthusiasm about this project, Mr. Speaker, our job is to take a look at the business case and determine whether or not it makes sense for Alberta taxpayers. Now, of course, we would have had a role and been asked to make a contribution, and we made the decision that in some cases while there might be those opportunities to have partnerships that provide for value-added, this wasn't one of them.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has sat on its hands for years, allowing our bitumen to be shipped south of the border to be upgraded and refined abroad, taking away jobs and revenue for our province. If not now for a project like this, Madam Premier, when?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, actually, the hon. member suggested that there's no bitumen upgrading happening here. You know, between 60 and 70 per cent of all of the bitumen produced is being upgraded right here. Certainly, the North West upgrader project is another example of a progressive attempt to increase that amount. The simple facts are that we have to gauge the merits of each project on a risk basis for the government, and obviously that translates into risk for taxpayers, so we make some tough decisions.

Mr. Hehr: Well, the simple fact of the matter is that if we don't start building upgraders or refineries, it's not going to be at that 60

to 70 per cent level. What are you going to do with all the bitumen that's being produced here if you don't get a refinery or project built right now?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we make investments in value-added and upgrading that make sense for Alberta taxpayers. We are going to make sure that we do not sell our bitumen at a discount, and we will not enter into any agreement on a commercial basis that doesn't make sense for all taxpayers.

2:00

MLA Remuneration

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this Premier should look up the definition of hypocrisy in a dictionary because she just gave a textbook example of it. She has ordered her MLAs to not receive any committee pay for a whole, gasp, two weeks before an election. Meanwhile this Premier voted herself a huge increase in her salary in 2008 behind closed doors right after the election, pocketing hundreds of thousands of tax dollars. Premier, how about you show some real-life leadership and roll back the 34 per cent wage increase that you and your cabinet voted yourselves and your friends back in 2008?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's been very interesting the past three or four days to see exactly the point that I made in my leadership campaign last year. That was that we have a confusing system that doesn't allow Albertans to understand what a transparent and open process looks like with respect to MLA compensation. The fact that we've had random suggestions here and there as to how to fix it in the last three or four days speaks to exactly that point. That is why on November 30 of last year I kept a commitment. We called an independent commission that will examine MLA salaries and benefits, and we will take that recommendation seriously, accept those recommendations.

Mr. Anderson: A 30 per cent salary increase. Thirty per cent. Shameful.

Given that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, who make probably half of what you do, Premier, have informed the Speaker that they will be returning all funds paid to them as members of this committee, will you roll back the ridiculous 34 per cent increase you gave yourself four years ago, right after the election, and return that money before the election to show that you are willing to sacrifice some of your own wrongful gains and not just those of your caucus members?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we will do exactly what I've committed to doing, which is to have an independent commission make a recommendation to not only how government members are paid but all members in this Legislature. When we take a look at the circumstances around compensation, I think there are a number of people in this House that are reflecting today on whether or not the system that we had in place was a system that allowed everyone to be accountable to the people that elected them. I'm looking forward to the results of that report.

Mr. Anderson: You've been here since 2008. You could have changed it. You certainly could have changed it in the last six months. You haven't.

Given you are the highest-paid Premier in Canada and given you are the highest-paid Premier of Canada because you voted for a 34 per cent increase in your own salary just a few days after the 2008 election was over and given you seem so happy to throw your caucus colleagues and their paycheques under the bus, surely you

are willing to show some real-life leadership and commit to rolling back your salary 34 per cent and to paying back the money you took from Albertans behind closed doors. Quit being such a shameless hypocrite.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what I will submit is that this report is going to be very important in terms of setting a direction for transparency.

The other thing I'll say: I find it terribly interesting that a number of people in this House who today have come up with a convenient stunt to try to polarize an issue are people who were fully aware of exactly what they were receiving for payment and did nothing about it until today, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's Representative in Asia

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, when the Premier won the Tory leadership, one of her first acts was to appoint Gary Mar as the province's trade commissioner in Hong Kong. She did this without an open competition and despite Mr. Mar's previous ethical violations. Now she has suspended Mr. Mar without pay, but she bears the ultimate responsibility for this situation. Why won't the Premier step up and take responsibility and admit that she appointed Mr. Mar because it was politically expedient?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of people that we appoint to trade offices all over the world that have a strong set of skills. You'll know that we also appointed the former Mayor of Calgary, Dave Bronconnier, to be in Washington, and he's doing a tremendous job. I think it's very important for government to be able to make decisions to identify a set of skills that matter to Alberta to advance Alberta's economic interests.

Mr. Speaker, when I appoint someone, I certainly expect them to follow all rules that are set out and codes of ethics. As I said, as soon as I was made aware of the situation on Friday, we took immediate action to get to the bottom of it. That's the first thing we need to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Mr. Mar was cited by the Ethics Commissioner for paying Kelley Charlebois \$400,000 for work that was never done and given that Mr. Charlebois was recently appointed the executive director of the PC Party, will the Premier admit that she knew of Mr. Charlebois' actions when she approved his appointment as executive director of the PC Party?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is the continuing discussion with respect to allegations that are unfounded. Now, I'm not going to deny the fact that there have been discussions with respect to how people have earned income, and that's fine, but what I will say is that I believe that anyone that I ask to do a job is going to follow codes of conduct that are in place, and if that has not been the case, then there will be consequences.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I think the Ethics Commissioner would differ that these allegations are unfounded. They come right out of his report.

Will the Premier admit that she knew about Mr. Mar's previous ethical violations when she appointed him as Alberta's trade commissioner to Hong Kong without a competition, and if so, why did she do that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the point. The suggestion that's been made over this weekend is that as Premier I should be jumping to a conclusion and making a decision without having all the facts before me. The preamble to this question did exactly the same thing. I'm not going to do that. We've asked the Ethics Commissioner to look at this. That is appropriate due process, and we should respect the process.

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

MLA Remuneration (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Jay O'Neill, a spokesman with the Premier's office, stated yesterday in the *Edmonton Sun*: "Cabinet ministers are not supposed to be collecting cash for sitting on committees." My first question is to the Premier. Is this statement correct?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I received no payment for sitting on that committee.

Mr. MacDonald: No. Again to the Premier: why did this spokesman from the Premier's office say that cabinet ministers are not supposed to be collecting cash for sitting on committees when we all know they collect on average \$35,000 a year from sitting on government committees?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there's a compensation package in place with respect to all MLAs and ministers. I've said very clearly that I don't believe that that's the appropriate system. That's why we called for Mr. Justice Major to take on this report, and I'll stand by the fact that we're going to accept the recommendations in that report.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: will the Premier's office issue a retraction of the spokesman's statement made yesterday, which was, in all truth, very disrespectful and misleading to taxpayers across the province?

Ms Redford: There was nothing in that statement yesterday from my office that was in any way incorrect. The only reason that anyone watching this might think that there was anything suspicious or incorrect about it is because of the insinuation and innuendo placed on it by this hon. member, and that is not appropriate. Every single year there is a public document in which every one of us in this House discloses how we get paid and what we get paid. I certainly disclose that every year, as does everyone else. There is nothing suspicious or secretive about that. It is public.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, it is not a system that I think we should continue with. We've asked for the independent commission, and I'm looking forward to the recommendations.

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

Spinal Cord Injury Research

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year in Alberta hundreds of people suffer strokes or spinal cord injuries that leave them with varying degrees of disability. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. As the minister responsible for Alberta Innovates' research system, with all the world-class research that's being done in Alberta, can he tell us

what's being done to find a cure for spinal cord injury and to improve the quality of life for these injured Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sure appreciate this question, especially on a day when we've had Mr. Rick Hansen in our Chamber. This province is doing a large amount of spinal cord research; in fact, almost \$40 million worth of research over the past three decades. On top of that, Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions has made a direct investment of \$12 million into the Rick Hansen Foundation, working on unique research towards a cure for spinal cord injury. We've also funded the Rick Hansen network to help work towards cures for this very necessary thing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister, then. The \$40 million is quite a contribution. Can he give us some specific examples of how the government of Alberta's contribution to this important field of research is making a difference for these injured Albertans?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of attending a Rick Hansen event about two weeks ago, where they highlighted some of the research that's been done in Alberta especially around spinal cord injury and stroke patients. There were two items I remember seeing. One was a joystick called ReJoyce, that allowed people that had an injury to play games with a joystick on the computer. It allowed them to gain the reuse of their hands, and as the game got tougher, they were able to coordinate and do a better and better job of it. Another product, developed right here in Edmonton, was a product called Smart-e-Pants, which allows people that can't move to stay away from having things like bedsores from inactivity.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My final question again to the same hon. minister: apart from the obvious benefits that he was describing to these people with these life-altering injuries, what are the other advantages, specifically to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would like all of our citizens to be able to fully participate in our province and in our communities and in our environment. The annual cost of spinal cord injury to the province of Alberta is around \$400 million. The research we do now, today, can have a direct impact on people's lives and on future budgets.

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

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone knows that the real solution to health care is not getting sick in the first place, prevention and wellness. Smoking is one of the leading causes of death and is responsible for a wide variety of lung diseases – asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer – as well as heart attacks, stroke, cardiovascular disease. Kids are especially vulnerable to second-hand smoke, and in Alberta despite all the

work that we've done – and we've done some good work – the childhood smoking rates have gone from 10 to 14 per cent. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is your plan to attack the childhood smoking rate issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is currently reviewing our Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. The strategy did see significant improvement in smoking rates and exposure to second-hand smoke in the last few years.

In addition, our tobacco legislation here in Alberta is among the most aggressive in the country, going beyond simple exposure to second-hand smoke and then taking into account, for example, issues such as the sale of tobacco in pharmacies or in stores that include pharmacies.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that there is first-hand smoke, where you're directly smoking and it's important to role-model for our young children, and given that second-hand smoke is an issue and there's evidence to say that it's bad for health and that now there's also evidence that third-hand smoke, just smoke on someone's clothes, is bad for our children, do you agree that protecting the health of our children in Alberta should be a top priority with respect to smoking?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this point the hon. member and I certainly do agree. As I was about to say, we are in the process of updating our tobacco reduction strategy. We're looking at a number of initiatives, including exposure to second-hand smoke as it relates to exposure of children in vehicles. We're looking at the sale of flavoured tobacco products and a number of other issues that we believe will have a particular impact on reducing smoking among youth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister taking steps and looking at these issues. I have a private member's bill, Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012, a special case of children being in small, enclosed spaces. To the minister: would you make it an offence to smoke in a vehicle with anyone under the age of 18 present?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I believe debate on the particular bill the hon. member refers to is on the Order Paper and may come up later this afternoon. I'll leave the debate on the aspects of the bill to that time.

What I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that the government takes this issue seriously. Rather than one-off initiatives, we are looking at a comprehensive update to our tobacco reduction strategy, and we'll continue to pursue that.

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

Enhanced Support for Home Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last week the minister announced new initiatives regarding home care and rehabilitation services. Mr. Minister, what is the mandate for this new program called destination home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The initiative the hon. member refers to is part of a \$25 million fund proposed in Budget 2012. Destination home is modelled after very successful programs in Ontario and other provinces that target a specific portion of home-care resources to seniors who may be able to return home if they have the proper support. In addition, it helps prevent seniors from having to, as a result of fall or injury, seek treatment in emergency departments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister. We're hearing concerns about long-term care and the long-term care beds that are required. Why are we putting money into this type of a program when it perhaps could be spent better elsewhere?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This funding is in addition to the over \$450 million that Alberta Health Services allocates to home care at this time. These funds are important because they are geared specifically to the people that we spend a lot of time in this Legislative Assembly talking about, those people who through no fault of their own and as a result of lack of support in the home environment find themselves seeking treatment in the emergency department and hospital. In addition, we certainly hope that these funds will help divert from the emergency department people who are currently living at home and who just need that little bit of extra support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister: how is this new initiative going to impact the employment of health professionals? Is it going to shift from registered nurses to personal support workers?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we actually see a role for all staff disciplines in the destination home program. It will continue as an interdisciplinary team approach, that has been so successful in other aspects of the health care system. It is an initiative that will work in concert with other initiatives, programs, and services in the health system such as the 24/7 home-care RN on-call service that was announced along with the destination home program. There will always be a variety of needs in our communities. Therefore, we will continue to work with the most qualified health professionals who know the communities to meet these particular needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to government policy, after health care the most important issue for Albertans is education. I'm hearing a lot of complaints about government building new P3 schools under the ASAP program. New schools like Esther Starkman and Johnny Bright in Edmonton are already full, and there's no room to grow. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that there's absolutely no money in the government's three-

year plan to build new schools or renovate old ones, where will we send our growing population of children to school?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have communicated on a number of occasions that it is this government's plan to meet the needs of education. We do know that not only in this province but in this country we tend to have schools where we don't have kids and kids where we don't have schools. That's why we're working with Treasury Board right now in making sure that we provide our children with the adequate spaces that they need to receive the education that they are receiving right now in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister may be planning on busing kids to those old schools. Whatever his plan is, he should be clear.

To the minister again: given that the Premier promised full-day kindergarten but given that many schools just don't have the space for it, when will the space be added to accommodate full-time kindergarten in Alberta?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, my department is working with the Ministry of Education to understand what the implications of full-day kindergarten are and what kind of an inventory of infrastructure additions we're going to need to be able to fulfill those commitments. As the Minister of Education has made clear in the recent month and through estimates, we're working through that in a phased approach to deliver on the Premier's promise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: given that I'm hearing from school boards that cookie-cutter designs of schools are not flexible enough to allow for boards to easily add extra modular classrooms, what is the minister doing to make sure that school board needs are met?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that is a challenge. Not every school board is the same, and not every community is the same. We want to be able to use the infrastructure that we have and leverage that to be efficient for the taxpayer. But to be efficient for the taxpayer, we also need to be able to deliver as many schools and projects as possible. So whenever we can, we're looking at P3s, we're looking at creative ways to deliver infrastructure to make sure that we get the best value for the taxpayer and then that we can deliver more schools and more spaces for the students that need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20 Disaster Recovery Program

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June 2010 – June 18, 2010, to be exact – hundreds of residents in Cypress county, Medicine Hat, and other communities in Alberta were hit hard by flooding. In the almost two years since this disaster some disaster recovery program applicants have contacted me with concerns about the assistance they're getting or not getting through the program. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It seems like improvements could and should be made to disaster assistance, particularly for flooding. Will you order a review of the program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that we have a tremendous amount of compensation for anyone that's been affected by some sort of natural disaster or flood. We know that there have been some concerns expressed around the way some of our projects have run. We're doing a third-party independent review of how we deliver disaster programs. We've picked out specifically the southern Alberta disaster recovery plan and the central and Vermilion disaster recovery plans just to examine what has worked well. There are a lot of things that have worked very well but also things that might not have worked as well as they could have. We can learn from that and improve the programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we're now in 2012. To the same minister: thank you, but why did it take so long to order a review of the disaster recovery program?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, the three disaster recovery programs that are being reviewed right now just ended. They are not receiving any more applicants. It takes a while to assess damage, especially flood-type damage. It can take a couple of years to assess it all and come up with valuations and finish out the program. We want to make sure that when we are going to do a review, we have all of the pertinent data and information and all of the applications in so that we work from all of the information and not make half-guesses or changes based on half-information. We want to do it right, not just fast.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that I've also heard concerns about LandLink, the company that administers the program, will you ensure that they're going to be a part of the review?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, that's a very fair question. We are reviewing every aspect of the program, from communication about how the program operated to service delivery and customer service to whether or not the protocols of the program operated in place and if the appropriate information was out there. LandLink delivers quite a few of those services on behalf of the province. We've heard a lot of positive stories, but we want to make sure that they're doing the best they possibly can, too, so they'll be part of the review.

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

Private Operation of Continuing Care Centres

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government stepped into a labour dispute to block the rights of workers. In so doing, they protected a private long-term care operator diverting public funds meant for employee salaries into their profit margin. Now this government claims they are protecting seniors, but they are only protecting the company using taxpayers' dollars to pad their bottom line. To the minister of labour: why is he helping a private long-term care company to shortchange its employees by 20 per cent while pocketing the difference?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, my role as Minister of Human Services is to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are protected and to make sure that labour standards are effectively carried out. In this particular circumstance, it is very clear that the vulnerable individuals involved, those who are residents of the home, would not be well served by having to move if there are not sufficient staff to take care of them in their place. It's not clear that there would be sufficient staff to care for them in their place. Therefore, the most important thing to do is to ensure that the labour dispute that's happening is dealt with appropriately and, more importantly, that the individuals involved have a safe environment in which to live.

Ms Notley: To the minister of health then. Given that this government already funds the company on the basis of what AHS pays its employees and given that money clawed back from front-line caregivers will neither save the taxpayer any money nor improve services to these residents, will the minister admit that this is a perfect example that having the private sector deliver publicly funded services hurts the quality of service received by vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the success of Alberta in the area of continuing care is a result of a partnership that involves government, not-for-profit organizations, and the private sector. To take this particular instance, which is an unfortunate instance and is under the disputes inquiry board that the hon. colleague referred to, and to generalize that as a failure of the system as a whole is a non sequitur that I'm not going to participate in.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the system has not been a success. Now, given that private companies will repeatedly attempt to divert public money for services toward padding their bottom line – that's what their shareholders want them to do – why won't the government really stand up for seniors and finally start funding more long-term care centres, or any, that are publicly administered so that seniors don't have to pay the cost of inflating a private company's profit margin through higher fees and compromised services? To the minister of health.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, with all respect to the hon. member, I do not think what Albertans want is a philosophical or an ideological debate about public versus private versus nonprofit. What they do want is a continuing care system and a range of options that work for them, that bring health care to them, in place in their own communities. That's what we're endeavouring to do.

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

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the ministers of Transportation and Human Services. On February 16 the Minister of Transportation asserted that he did not believe it to be "legal for individuals, whether they be farm workers . . . to ride in the back of a pickup truck on our highways" when asked by the Member for Calgary-McCall. However, section 85 of the Alberta rules of the road regulation exempts those who work in agriculture. To the minister: will the minister admit he was wrong and tell this House why this group of Albertans are allowed to travel in an unsafe way on the highways?

Mr. Danyluk: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is not legal for individuals to travel in open vehicles in the back unless in the exempt areas, and I think farming is one of them.

Dr. Swann: Thank you for admitting that. You didn't admit that last week.

Given the minister's very public position that safety on our highways is a high priority, why does the minister allow paid farm workers in Alberta to be treated differently from all other Albertans?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I very much believe that we have to have a common-sense approach, and that common-sense approach is very much about: there are a lot of businesses, whether it be a construction crew or whether it be farmers, that need to have individuals that are in the back of vehicles. There is no doubt that if you look at the recreation aspect of it or at individuals riding in the back of a truck, it's not allowed.

Dr. Swann: We just heard a nonsense approach, Mr. Speaker, not a common-sense approach.

Let's try the Minister of Human Services. Why is your ministry and this government perpetuating this discriminatory and dangerous double standard?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's important always to look at the context of things that are happening. I think it's very clear from the Minister of Transportation's response that in most circumstances it would not be appropriate for people to ride in the back of a pickup truck on a highway, and it's illegal in most circumstances. There may be short circumstances where you're moving from one field to another. There's no good reason for anybody to be in the back of a pickup truck, farmer or otherwise, if they're going to town. But if you're moving from one field to another or some contextual situation, it may well be appropriate as long as it's done carefully.

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

Charter Schools

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I was pleased to be at Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, where they received the good news that their charter was being renewed for a 15-year term, the first school to receive this extended term. Also announced that day was that the enrolment caps for charter schools were being reviewed and would increase for some schools. Can the Minister of Education explain what that means to schools like Foundations for the Future, which has thousands of children waiting for spots in this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The charters have been extended up to 15 years for those charters that meet the requirements of Alberta Education relative to the quality of education that they deliver, and most do. That was to diminish their bureaucratic nightmare of having to continuously apply for a charter renewal. We also have allowed the existing charter schools to rightsize themselves, meaning that if they were in buildings that simply had the capacity to absorb more students and their cap was below that capacity, we lifted their capacity to the maximum that the school can absorb.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If, as the minister says, the growth will happen only in a few schools, then why get people's

hopes up that they may get an opportunity to have their child enrol in one of the charter programs that is already operating at capacity?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that speaks very well to the quality of education and to the choice that charter schools offer. Obviously, parents are in some cases choosing charter schools over other modalities of delivering education. We will continuously be reviewing the uptake of students in charter schools, but we also encourage other education providers to look at some of the programs that are being offered by charter schools and replicate them so that more children in Alberta can have access to similar programs offered by a variety of school providers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit to providing funding to these schools so that they can buy or lease new spaces to expand their programs?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, right now charter schools are in a variety of lease or ownership arrangements throughout the province. At this point in time the budget has been tabled in the Alberta Legislature, and we have debated it. Subject to it passing, there are no specific provisions to increase funding for infrastructure for charter schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

2:30 **Alberta's Representative in Asia** (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know from the promotional advertising that Mr. Mar used his position to auction off a trip to Hong Kong to help pay off his leadership campaign fund. Was Gary Mar's plane trip back to Alberta from Hong Kong to attend this unethical fundraiser paid for by the Alberta taxpayers? To the minister of international relations.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, as we discussed earlier today, this matter was placed before the Ethics Commissioner, and I'm not prepared to comment until the Ethics Commissioner has concluded his work.

Mr. Hinman: They know that they paid for it. Again, cover-up and corruption.

Given that the appointment of Gary Mar was a pure political appointment and given that Premiers have fired other political appointments for far less, when will the Premier do the right thing and ask Gary Mar to give the money back and fire him?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much clearer I could be about this. The matter has been placed with the Ethics Commissioner. We'll allow him to go about doing his work. He will report back, and we'll go from there.

Mr. Hinman: It didn't take so long with a letter to a school board, yet they need to review with the Ethics Commissioner. Unbelievable.

Given the amount of the scandal in the health care, MLA committees, and the Gary Mar affair that is now coming to light under what is clearly a PC culture of corruption, why is the Premier refusing to do anything about these scandals until after the votes of the next election?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the matter is before the Ethics Commissioner. He'll do his work and report back.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Farm Safety

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Other members have alluded to and talked about farm safety, and farm safety week is upon us as we speak. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Does the minister have anything planned to heighten the awareness of farm safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Plan•Farm•Safety is the theme of a three-year Canadian Agricultural Safety Association campaign, which started back in 2010. Mr. Speaker, 2010 promoted plan, with an emphasis on planning for safety. In 2011 the focus was on farm, with highlights on implementation, documentation, and training. This year's focus is on safety, recognizing that everyone has a role in farm safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what other steps is the minister taking to improve farm safety?

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, adults and children all deserve a safe place to work and play. That's why our government believes that education and awareness are best suited to the practical realities of Alberta farming. This government provides annual funding to farm safety programming, including workshops, awareness campaigns, in-school presentations, and grants to farm community agencies. I recently announced a \$2 million regional agricultural society grant to increase farm safety, to help the next generation of farm producers with farm safety programs and ongoing initiatives to that end.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a past agrologist I know that activities on farms are rapidly ramping up. We're going through calving season, and there is very, very little snow left out there, so crops and the cropping season will come upon us very soon. To the same minister: what more is the government prepared to do to improve farm safety during this important time?

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, I am in receipt of the farm safety council's recommendations, but our government will deal with that in due time. In the meantime, education and awareness, of course, are the best ways to deal with the practical realities of the farm. As I stand here this afternoon, my son will be at home doing chores, and what I count on is his awareness and his education on safety to protect him and keep him safe, just the same way I went through it because of the fellow that I introduced earlier pounding farm safety into me. That's how we'll do this.

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

Midwifery Services

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There are few seats for the one midwifery education program in Alberta, so many Albertans obtain their training elsewhere. Now, because Alberta has not signed on to the international midwifery preregistration program, our internationally trained midwives face

a \$32,000 bill to go through this process. My questions are to the minister of health. Given the shortage of midwives in the province is the minister aware of the number of internationally trained midwives seeking registration in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, yes. I met with the college of midwives and their association representatives a little more than a week ago. It is true that there is a shortage of midwives in Alberta. We are concerned about that. We are also concerned about ensuring that we provide an environment that allows midwives to practise to their full scope of training and expertise. The health professions legislation in Alberta and the midwives' regulation are based on the parameters of the scope of practice in the Canadian midwifery framework. We intend to support our midwives in achieving the ability to practise to the full extent of their expertise.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Minister, for that answer. Again to the same minister: given that it appears that recently about nine applicants for preregistration were advised to apply to bridging programs, which would require that same \$32,000, is the minister considering creating a made-in-Alberta preregistration program?

Dr. Sherman: Good question.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. I have not had any specific discussions with the midwives or their association about a bridging program. What we have discussed is making sure that the midwives who are licensed to practice in Alberta have the opportunity to go beyond the traditional maternity services, maternity support role in our hospitals and be able to practise in the community, supporting home births and other alternatives that Alberta women want and expect.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: well, wouldn't the minister agree that this a perfect opportunity to consider this? We have the existing midwifery multidisciplinary project under review. We have a brand new college of midwives. Wouldn't this be the perfect opportunity to create a fair and unbiased preregistration program?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to take the hon. member's comments about a bridging program under advisement and use that idea along with other issues that we're trying to address in my discussions with midwives. As I said, our intention as a government is to do everything we can to support midwives in practising to the full extent of their training and expertise.

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

Skilled Workforce Training Programs

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, one of Canada's leading business associations, declared that our nation's relatively strong economic standing will be in crisis if we don't take steps to tackle the impending skilled labour shortage as the growth performance and competitiveness of our businesses and industries are critical to Alberta's economic future. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is your department doing to ensure that Alberta businesses stay competitive and have enough skilled tradespeople?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, it is critically important that as we come out of this slowdown, we have appropriately trained people in place. Over the past year my ministry has provided bridging funding of \$17 million to our postsecondaries to keep positions available for skills training even though those seats were not full. We've also changed the ratio of apprentices to journeymen so that we could get more apprentices into the workplace, and we've started to put trades training online. We have four trades online now, with more to come.

Ms Woo-Paw: When employers are desperate to find more skilled workers, why aren't you adding more apprenticeship seats?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying earlier, we've managed to maintain seats for apprenticeships even though they weren't being utilized this year because we believe that as the economy comes back, we're going to need them. There's a critical importance of jobs and employment for apprentices to be able to train, so we do need our employers to step up to the table with us to make sure that we can have appropriately trained apprentices in place for the workforce.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third and final question is to the same minister. What about those that don't have a job yet like our youth and newcomers? Can they get started?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an important thing, working with newcomers to the province of Alberta. As part of that we've streamlined our processes for assessing the skills of people coming into the province and looking for ways to bridge their skills into our workforce.

Some of the other things that have been done along with our Premier's visit to the United States are looking for ways to prequalify people in certain trades from other jurisdictions like the United States so that when they come in here, we know what their skills are and can take them right into our workforce very quickly and take advantage of their skills within the needed trades.

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

2:40

Provincial Tax Policy

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My questions will be to the Minister of Finance. This government is running deficits, raising tuition, deferring maintenance on public infrastructure, draining its savings, and spending a hundred per cent of its nonrenewable resource revenues. At the same time, taxes in Alberta could rise \$11 billion and still be tied for the lowest in Canada. This is completely unsustainable. Given that this government has ruled out tax increases, how will this problem be fixed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, because this member started off with a preamble, that maybe I have a preamble to the answer. The preamble to the answer is this. This is the only province in Canada that has no net debt. This is the province in Canada that has the lowest unemployment rate. This is the only province in Canada that has a sustainability fund and a

heritage fund. This is the only province in Canada that will be looking for workers, not having people unemployed.

The whole issue around taxation we've discussed thoroughly in this Assembly, and we'll continue to discuss it as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister mentioned the heritage trust fund. Given that the per capita inflation-adjusted value of the heritage fund has declined 60 per cent since its peak in 1982, does this government plan to rebuild the value of the fund, and if so, how?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that we've been very clear that as we move forward, we need to have a discussion with Albertans relative to not only taxes, not only the resource revenues and where they go and what they pay for but also the savings strategy of the province going forward.

We have to remember that in the past six or seven years this government has invested some \$30 billion to \$40 billion in critical infrastructure in this province. If this particular member is suggesting that we should not have done that, that that money should have gone into the heritage savings trust fund, well, then I'd suggest he stand up and say so so that constituents in Edmonton understand they would not have a ring road, they would not have an Edmonton clinic, they would not have a dozen new schools, and they would not have an LRT that goes to the south side of the city.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. [interjections] This is great fun.

I would not say that. What I would say is that taxes on the rich and on corporations should be raised. [interjections] I told you it would be fun, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] This is a serious question if I could have the floor.

Given the growing reports that the same technology that caused a glut of the natural gas market and gutted the government's natural gas royalties could do the same for oil in the next year or two, which would also hammer this government's treasury, what is this government's contingency plan for this significant risk?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's good to hear that more than just the leader in the Official Opposition are on the record that we need to tax people more. That's good to hear, and we want to hear that continually from that particular group as we move through the next 30 or 40 days. I think Albertans will make the choice. We will soon be asking Albertans to make a choice. They will have the opportunity of whether to vote for a group of individuals who don't want to spend any money on infrastructure or whether they want to vote for a group of individuals who want to tax more and put some money away in the savings account. They'll make the choice.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-response period today. Nineteen members were recognized, 114 questions and responses.

Statement by the Speaker

Member Anniversaries

The Speaker: We are going to move very quickly, but first of all, before we go back to the Routine, there is a recognition here for a number of members in this Assembly who were elected for their

first time on March 12 of 2001, so their 11th anniversary: the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake; the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the Minister of Transportation; the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster; the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central-Peace; the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky; the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw; the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs; the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert; the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow; the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne; the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; and the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Congratulations.

It's happy birthday time for the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Members' Statements

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

Rick Hansen 25th Anniversary Relay

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to salute a truly inspirational Canadian, today's very special guest, Mr. Rick Hansen. Few people in the history of the world have demonstrated the vision, endurance, and effectiveness at the levels that Rick has. Twenty-five years ago Rick did something that was thought to be impossible. He wheeled himself 40,000 kilometres through 34 countries in 26 months on his epic Man in Motion World Tour, and as Rick just told us, that was just the beginning.

Ever since then Rick has cultivated innumerable powerful partnerships, including with our Alberta government. Over the past 30 years we've been proud to provide \$34 million in support for spinal cord research, and we are seeing great results, including with Dr. Arthur Prochazka and his revolutionary ReJoyce rehabilitation system; Dr. Vivian Mushahwar, whose Smart-e-Pants prevent painful pressure ulcers; and Dr. Richard Stein with his WalkAide, which helps people with stroke or spinal cord injury to walk.

These are innovations developed right here in Alberta, with the spark supplied by Rick Hansen. Rick is now sharing his vision and his action with an entirely new generation via his 25th anniversary relay, which is shining the light on over 7,000 difference makers of all kinds clear across the country. Having experienced a back broken in six places myself in the past, it was a great honour recently to support the cause by carrying the medal in the relay with my family and to a mountaintop with a great friend.

With Rick's friends and fans around the world I thank him and his family and his team for kick-starting the race for a cure for paralysis, jolting people into changing their minds and actions, and, quite simply, making this world a better place for us all. Through continued collaboration we will live in a more inclusive world, a world in which the newly injured will walk away from spinal cord injury.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Second-hand Smoke

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every adult citizen has a duty to help protect children. Human beings have an instinctive awareness of this duty because we see that children are vulnerable, that they are our future, and that they have not yet developed the full capacity to care for themselves. One of the very best ways to protect children is to insulate them from the harmful effects of

second-hand smoke. That's the goal of my private member's bill, which would make it an offence for adults to smoke in vehicles while anyone under the age of 18 is present.

Second-hand smoke leads to a wide range of health problems, including asthma, emphysema, lung cancer, stroke, heart attacks, and respiratory illnesses. As an ER doc I've seen kids suffering from asthma attacks, and I can't tell you how frustrating it is when the parents have smoked on the way to the hospital.

When adults smoke in cars with children present, it creates two problems. The first, of course, is that they're exposing kids to second-hand smoke in a confined space with no escape. In the winter you can't even roll the window down for some fresh air.

The second problem is that smoking in the car with kids sends the message that smoking is okay. It's about leadership and role modeling, Mr. Speaker. If my parents do it, why shouldn't I? That's the message. If adults stopped smoking in cars with kids present, that's one less place where kids can get the idea that smoking is cool, especially from their parents. That's important because we need to remember that teen smoking rates have been rising lately, and we must reverse that trend.

Prevention, my friends, is the key. It's the key to preventing tobacco-related illnesses, to lowering the cost of public health care, to raising the quality of life for every single Albertan in this province. I hope that all members of this House will see the wisdom in preventing second-hand smoke from hurting Alberta's children. We have not just an opportunity but a duty to protect our kids from second-hand smoke.

Thank you.

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

2:50 **Ethnocultural Inclusivity and Integration**

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize some dynamic community builders. The Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary acts as a collective voice for Calgary's ethnocultural communities towards full civic participation and integration through collaborative action. Its key initiatives include dialogue between community and government; supporting research and policy analysis on issues affecting their communities such as voter participation, racial profiling, and racial discrimination; as well as community-based primary prevention, that focuses on the root causes of domestic violence, as an example.

The Edmonton Multicultural Coalition aims to advocate for healthy and inclusive public policies and to build the participatory capacity for institutional/sector partners. Their Injera initiative with the Edmonton Police Service, Reach Edmonton, and the city of Edmonton enhances the capacity of the police to work with the community through a crime prevention project where stakeholders learn the culture of police and the cultural communities they serve.

Since 1995 the Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative has tirelessly supported immigrants and refugees to attain optimum health through education, community development, and programs such as perinatal outreach and multicultural family support for children with disabilities. These organizations possess incredible capacity and commitment to bridging between sectors, operate within a dynamic cross-cultural and multicultural framework, and also position themselves for continual innovation.

The leveling the playing field initiative between the Edmonton health brokers co-op, the Creating Hope Society, and Human Services through deepening the understanding of aboriginal and immigrant/refugee families aims to identify practice and policy

changes most supportive of culturally respectful and responsive services for these families.

Mr. Speaker, these organizations came together recently to form DiverseCT Alberta, a network of Alberta cities and towns for diversity, focusing on advancing community-based and public policy solutions to issues affecting the province's diverse citizens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Arctic Winter Games 2012

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I rise today to recognize 230 members of Team Alberta North, including athletes from my own constituency, who travelled to Whitehorse for the 2012 Arctic Winter Games. The Arctic games are also known as the Friendly Games. Having hosted them in Grande Prairie in 2010, I know that this reputation is well deserved. These games are as much about sharing and culture as they are about athletic competition.

For six memorable days teams from northern Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut, Quebec, Alaska, Greenland, Russia, and Scandinavia participated in events that celebrate northern traditions and promote active lifestyles. Alberta's athletes competed in sports like badminton, ski biathlon, cross-country skiing, curling, snowshoeing, and hockey and in Arctic sports and Dene games like arm pull, one-foot high kick, kneel jump, knuckle hop, head pull, and snow snake.

Placing fourth overall, Team Alberta North brought home a total of 104 ulus, including 40 gold, 37 silver, and 27 bronze. The ulu, a symbol of athletic achievement at the Arctic Winter Games, is styled after the traditional Inuit knife used as an all-purpose tool in the Arctic for centuries.

I want to congratulate all the members of Team Alberta for their many achievements at this year's games. These dedicated young people from north of the 55th parallel are the pride of our entire province. I'd like everyone here to give them a round of applause to show our appreciation and pride in all the members of Team Alberta North.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Greenhouse Research and Production Complex

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 1 I had the pleasure of participating in the official opening of the greenhouse research and crop production complex, GRPC, at the Crop Diversification Centre South in Brooks. This new facility is an investment of more than \$17 million by the Alberta government into our province's greenhouse and crop research and production industry and is a valuable asset to our province.

The complex supports Alberta greenhouse growers by conducting scientific crop research and by growing test crops in a simulated large-scale commercial greenhouse setting. In touring this impressive facility, I saw production greenhouses where tomatoes and peppers were grown and research greenhouses where research into areas such as crop disease, molecular farming, greenhouse robotics, and aquaponics take place.

This facility will help to ensure that our province stays on the leading edge of applied and adaptive crop research, technology transfer, and technology commercialization. It is one of the most advanced facilities of its kind in North America, truly a world-class facility. Every aspect of its design and operation is equipped to create and test greenhouse innovation for scientists, growers,

agribusiness, and educators. It is a place to go for solutions, support, and training.

Greenhouses provide other benefits to Albertans beyond supplying fresh and local food to markets. There are currently 328 greenhouses operating in the province, creating 4,800 full-time and part-time jobs and an annual gross revenue of around \$160 million.

Mr. Speaker, this new research facility contributes economically to Alberta. It will also generate a significant amount of experimental data, invaluable technical information, and business models for the greenhouse industry in Alberta and western Canada. This government is working hard to ensure that our crop industry is among the most competitive and progressive in the world, and by investing in this world-class greenhouse research and production facility, we will accomplish that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans are in need, they can count on this government to stand up and do what is right. Recently our government took a big step in doing the right thing to improve the lives of severely handicapped Albertans. In Budget 2012 we announced an increase of \$400 to the monthly financial benefit for the assured income for the severely handicapped. At the same time we also doubled the income exemption thresholds, allowing AISH clients to earn twice as much money without it affecting their benefits. This was a commitment that the Premier made to Albertans, and it is yet another example to show that when this Premier makes a commitment, this Premier keeps a commitment.

Mr. Speaker, AISH is important to many Albertans as it provides both financial and health-related assistance necessary to meet clients' basic needs. With this \$400 increase AISH clients are now eligible for a total monthly living allowance of \$1,588. Furthermore, in terms of health benefits AISH clients will continue to receive prescription drugs, dental assistance, optical coverage, diabetic supplies, and ambulance services. For those AISH clients living in long-term care, they will continue to have their room-and-board costs covered at the private-room rate of up to \$1,700 per month plus a personal allowance of \$315 per month for a maximum of \$2,015 per month in benefits.

Mr. Speaker, increased funding to the AISH program represents our government's commitment to assisting our most vulnerable citizens and maintaining their living standards, which together will enhance their quality of life. As a government we have a responsibility to ensure that Albertans are able to meet their basic needs. I'm proud to say that under this Premier we are fulfilling this responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Alston Scout Park

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to acknowledge the Alston Scout park, located in the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner, which I have been proud to represent. This park is named in honour of Louisa Grant Alston, who moved to Magrath from Utah in 1900 along with her eight children to join her husband, who had come to Alberta to live.

Louisa and her family were pioneers in the area, and Louisa was part of the first primary presidency in Magrath, an organization

which taught Christian values to children. More than 100 years later, in 2003, the Alston Park Foundation was established, and it raised \$25,000 in short order through golf tournaments, family and private donations. Over the next nine years additional funds were raised between numerous community fundraising efforts and grants through Alberta's community initiatives program which led to the building of the park and the official dedication of the park on July 22, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Alston Scout park in Magrath is a perfect example of how the spirit and support of community and government initiatives work together in benefiting Alberta communities. The Alston Scout park is located on main street in Magrath. The park features many scouting exhibits and serves as a great place for families to go to relax, spend time together, and reflect.

I would like to acknowledge the history of the Alston Scout park and commend the Alston family and community for all their hard work in realizing such a worthwhile project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, I should point out that in a few seconds from now we will arrive at a situation where Standing Order 7(7) kicks in. "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." Having done that, shall I now recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't even cite the rule number. You've taken it out of my mouth.

The Speaker: It's my job.

Mr. Denis: I would like to move for unanimous consent to waive rule 7(7) for today only.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the request is to waive the standing order so that we can conclude the Routine. It has to be unanimous so I'll just ask one question: is anybody opposed? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 20(2) of the Auditor General Act I would like to table five copies of a report by the Auditor General entitled Report of the Auditor General of Alberta, March 2012.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table an op-ed from the March 11, 2012, *Calgary Herald* entitled A New Perspective: The Health-care Glass Is Not Half Empty, written by Dr. Tom Feasby, dean of medicine at the University of Calgary. The op-ed states: "Criticism of health care is fine, in fact necessary, if it is constructive and balanced. This has not been in the case in Alberta for some time." I would encourage all hon. members to read this op-ed.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition signed by 776 Albertans. The

petition reads: “We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to take immediate action to regulate electricity prices, recognizing that electricity is an essential service.” These are in addition to the 1,200 signatures for this petition that were previously tabled.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have six tablings. I’d like to table a letter to Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resources, information technology and broadcast services, tabling the return of \$43,656.17 back to the Ministry of Finance, Legislative Assembly Office.

I’d like to table five copies of my cheque, that was delivered today.

With respect to youth smoking rates I’d like to table five copies of the youth smoking rates among Albertans aged 12 to 19. The source is the Canadian community health survey.

I also have five copies of an e-mail from the Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta/NWT division, dated March 9, 2012, supporting Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012.

Five copies from the Lung Association, Alberta & NWT, dated March 9, 2012, again supporting a free vote on Bill 203.

Five copies from the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention dated March 9, 2012, again supporting Bill 203.

Finally, I’d like to table five copies of Smoke-Free Vehicles: Protecting Youth from Exposure to Tobacco Smoke in Vehicles, from Campaign for a Smoke-free Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Human Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Mr. MacDonald, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on February 13, 2012, Department of Human Services, supplementary supply estimates.

The Speaker: The daily Routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203

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

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care accounts for 40 to 50 per cent of every provincial budget across the nation. In Alberta we can’t balance our budget because we’ve got a lot of sick people here. What we need to do is focus our health care system and the way we think as a society not on a sickness system but on a prevention and wellness system.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that the leading cause of death in Canada is no longer heart disease? It’s actually cancer. Lung

cancer is one of those cancers. Some of the other causes of costs to health care are asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, addictions. Smoking is a major cause of these problems, major costs not only in terms of health care dollars but actually in terms of human suffering. If you have a business, the health of your labour work force determines the economic productivity of your labour workforce. Lost productivity actually affects the bottom line of business. A healthy population is a wealthy population.

So, Mr. Speaker, it’s my pleasure to rise for a second time to discuss Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012. I move second reading of Bill 203.

When this act comes into force on January 1, 2013, the province will have taken one very large, positive step towards the protection of our children from a dangerous killer, second-hand smoke. Although the wording of the bill is quite simple, to amend the Tobacco Reduction Act in order to prohibit smoking “in a vehicle in which a minor is present,” the outcome would be nothing short of monumental.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to talk about some facts and figures, and I believe that facts actually speak for themselves. It’s incumbent upon us as policy-makers to make decisions based on merit, evidence, and fact. We in Alberta, I will acknowledge, have taken steps in the recent past to address smoking in public places. I believe that was a very good thing.

Smoking rates amongst children is where we are failing. We’ve failed to meet the youth tobacco reduction target for the last few years. We were trending properly. We went from 12 per cent to 11 per cent from 2007 to 2008, but in 2010 childhood smoking rates went up to 14 per cent, approximately a 30 per cent increase.

Alberta kids continue to be exposed to second-hand smoke in a number of settings, including motor vehicles. The levels of second-hand smoke in cars are worse than levels previously experienced in bars and taverns, especially in small, teeny, little child-sized lungs.

Tobacco use is a known contributor to many of the leading causes of disease and premature death in Alberta: cancer, heart disease, et cetera. Tobacco use cost the Alberta health care system an estimated \$470 million in 2002 alone, and it’s much more than that in 2012. We now have one of the highest youth smoking rates in the nation, and I just recently tabled this chart. Alberta and Quebec are the only remaining provinces without legislation to protect children from second-hand smoke in vehicles.

Real-life examples, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you that nothing bothers the bejesus out of me more than when I’ve got a four-month- or six-month-old baby suffocating – suffocating – and struggling to breathe 60 times a minutes, sucking in between the ribs, and the parents have been smoking on the way to the hospital. It’s absolutely tragic. What’s even more tragic is to actually know that this child is going to go home, and they’re going to be smoking again. These children end up back in hospital.

You know, after 20 years of practising medicine, if there’s one thing we’re going to accomplish in the Legislature, we must stop this practice. We must send a message to our society. Please don’t smoke in front of your kids, and especially in enclosed spaces. It’s dangerous to the health of your children, literally. The health risk of second-hand smoke for young children: there’s extensive evidence that it damages their lung lining and hurts their immunity.

3:10

Arguments against intrusion or private residence. Mr. Speaker, many people are going to say: “You know what? Get out of my

bedroom. The government is playing too big a role in my behaviour.” You know what? We shouldn’t actually have to legislate common sense. We don’t want to get inside people’s homes. We don’t want to get inside people’s bedrooms, but unfortunately I believe that we as policy-makers must take steps to protect these young babies who have no voice. For those Albertans or hon. members who may have concerns with this act on the grounds that they view it as too intrusive or that their vehicle is an extension of their private residence, I would remind them of the need to balance the public interests and the private interest and our duty as a moral, civilized society to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

The maximum fine of \$1,000 associated with the first offence will be consistent with all current violations of the Tobacco Reduction Act: smoking in a public place, smoking in a workplace, smoking within a prescribed distance from a doorway, window, or air intake of a public place or workplace. It is also consistent with the specific goals of this government’s tobacco reduction strategy that, I believe, all members of all political parties would support: preventing tobacco use by youth, cessation of tobacco use by current tobacco users, and protection of all Albertans from second-hand smoke.

Finally, there is no restriction on people smoking in their own vehicles. You can smoke all you want in your car. Please don’t do it in front of a baby or a young person. However, the confined space of a vehicle is not like the interior of a home or a big building. If someone is smoking at home, they can go out to the patio, and those who don’t want to be affected won’t be affected. They can move to another room.

There are no options for a minor in a vehicle but just to sit there and breathe toxic air: toxic, poisonous air. It’s a well-known fact that there are a number of carcinogens and very toxic chemicals inside cigarettes. The principle of protecting our children’s welfare should always be paramount. In fact, as an emergency doctor if we become aware of child abuse or suspected child abuse, it’s our duty to report it. I’m not suggesting this is child abuse, but I am suggesting that we must protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, role modelling. I’d like to speak for a moment about the power of role modelling. Anyone who raises children is familiar with the reality of monkey see, monkey do. I’m going to be honest. You know what? I smoked when I was nine years old. Why? Because I saw my father smoke. You know, I’ll make light of this. He gave me a beating. He did. He gave me a beating because I smoked, and I probably deserved it.

I wish my father had quit smoking. The one-year anniversary of his death is coming up on March 20. I will tell you that after three strokes, 15 heart attacks, two pacemakers, five brand-new blood vessels that they put in his heart, two brand-new blood vessels in his legs combined with diabetes and hypertension: I wish my father had stopped smoking when I stopped smoking. I stopped smoking at the age of nine after that beating. After his retirement – he’d worked extraordinarily hard – he really didn’t enjoy his life. It was so tough to see him suffer.

Not only should we not smoke in front of our children; people should take that sense of personal responsibility and, beyond that, role-model for our children. Mr. Speaker, when parents smoke in front of their children, especially in cars, our children learn how to smoke and are essentially smoking from the day they’re born. In fact, if the mother smokes, there is great evidence out there that it produces lower birth weight babies. That child has been smoking before it was even born. We’ve got to put a stop to that. We must put a stop to that.

We need a cultural change with regard to minors and smoking. It cannot be okay to smoke while pregnant, for youth to smoke,

for parents to smoke in a confined area like vehicles when children are present. It’s an important preventative health step, the wisdom of which certain municipalities in this province, for example Okotoks, and many provinces in this country have already implemented. Mr. Speaker, sometimes Alberta shows leadership by leading; sometimes we show leadership by following. There are only two provinces that haven’t passed this law, Alberta and Quebec. We’ve got to get with the game here. This is a no-brainer.

Mr. Speaker, I know that sometimes we all get stuck with partisanship and accept good ideas because of where they came from or reject good ideas because of where they came from. When I was the parliamentary assistant to the minister of health, on that side, I tabled Bill 215, the same bill, in the Legislature. It was tabled. The Ministry of Health and Wellness supported it. The minister at the time, the hon. Member for Calgary-West, supported it. The bureaucracy supported it. It came to the floor of the House. Unfortunately, we ran out of time in 2008. It didn’t get to second or third reading.

I brought this bill up when I was on that side of the House and now on this side of the House. I would ask all members to please consider: this isn’t a Liberal idea; it’s not a Conservative idea; it’s the right idea. I would ask all hon. members to think about their children and our future and to support Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012. I ask them: please do not let the opportunity in this instance to do the right thing, to protect our children from a very real killer, second-hand smoke, pass you by for partisan reasons.

We will argue and fight and debate on many other things. We will. We will disagree on many things and agree on many others. But this, I believe, we can all agree on. At least, I hope we can. I would plead with you, please, to not use the old excuse in not supporting this legislation that the government sometime in the future will introduce broader legislation with many other things lumped in, which would also be important. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned some of those today, and I would ask that he support this as well. I would ask the hon. members not to use that excuse, the overall tobacco reduction strategy, because I believe that would be a cop-out. The bill is here. We’re here doing the work. We’re going into the election. Let’s not wait and delay this any longer, because it would be leadership delayed. A decision delayed with respect to our children in this instance would be leadership delayed.

3:20

I’m going to give you an example. There was legislation tabled by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar about EpiPens. That’s a public safety issue. We have defibrillators in public places. Many people have anaphylaxis and life-threatening, severe anaphylactic reactions. This idea I supported, but it was rejected because of the source. It came from a Liberal MLA.

Mr. Speaker, I ask forgiveness from the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, but the day after I was removed from caucus, that hon. member had a near fatal anaphylactic reaction from a peanut, and we didn’t have an EpiPen on-site.

I was PA for Health and Wellness. This bill had the support of Alberta Health and Wellness and the government caucus but died on the Order Paper. You have a very straightforward bill before you, and if you agree with it, I would ask you to support it now. We can start saving our children’s lives today if we have the courage to act now. It’s the right thing to do, so why wait?

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on a very important issue that affects our children. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests before we move on?

I have two speakers that have indicated their desire to speak. One is the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and then the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. If others are interested, kindly send a note.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to combine my two introductions into one. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House participants and friends from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary's leadership, engagement, action, and development project, the LEAD initiative. This initiative seeks to increase the level of community leadership, civic engagement, and volunteerism as well as cross-cultural collaboration in Calgary's ethnocultural communities to advance issues and point to them.

Our guests are seated in the members' gallery, and as I say the name of their society, would they please stand. I apologize that I cannot include all of the names because of the length of the list: the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, the Council of Filipina-Canadian Women, connecting elders of ethnocultural communities project, the Calgary-Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, the Bangladesh Canada Association of Calgary, the Calgary Japanese Community Association, the Calgary Korean Scholarship Foundation, the Calgary Korean Seniors Association, the cultural engagement project, the Peruvian Cultural Association in Calgary, Possibilities in Motion, the Vietnamese Christian faithful fellowship, the Excel Family and Youth Society, the Fountain of Orphans and Vulnerable Women, the India Canada Association, the AIDS Calgary African communities project, the Arsii-Oromo, the Assam community of Alberta, the Aweil Union Society, the Calgary Vietnamese Women for Friendship and Progress Association, the *Canadian Latino Newspaper*, the Coalition for Equal Access to Education, as well as representatives from the Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative, members of the Edmonton Multicultural Coalition, and representatives from the Creating Hope Society.

Mr. Speaker, as the founding member of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary I'm very proud to have worked with many of these remarkable individuals and community leaders in past decades, and I'm very pleased to have had the opportunity earlier today to make a member's statement about the great work that these groups of people are doing to benefit Albertans from all corners of our province.

I would like to ask the members in this House to extend to them the warmest traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203

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

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise to speak to private member's Bill 203. I've thought a lot about this piece of legislation, and quite frankly it's had me thinking a lot about my last 10 years as a Member of this Legislative Assembly. I actually find it somewhat humorous, I guess is the only way I could describe it, that of all of the pieces of legislation I've seen us debate in this House for the last 10 years, the sins are some of the most hotly contested and debated pieces of legislation.

To give consideration, we've just discussed upping the penalty, from a 24-hour suspension to a three-day suspension and a three-day vehicle seizure, for those people who have a blood-alcohol content of between .05 and .08. They are impaired when they're driving. Maybe they're not criminally impaired, but they're impaired. In fact, 300 people in this province have been killed by people with an impairment between that level. It's so hotly contested and debated. I can tell from other pieces of legislation on smoking that we've passed in the past that this is going to be a hotly contested and debated piece of legislation, maybe not in this House, but it will be on Alberta's streets. I find it very interesting.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, I remember when we introduced in the legislation on smoking a setback from doorways, and there was so much controversy about it. Comments were made to me that we were taking away people's fundamental rights, that pretty soon they weren't going to be able to smoke anywhere but in their vehicle. Now they won't be able to smoke in their vehicle as long as there are minors present. I can tell that I'm going to receive many cards and letters for my position on this.

Mr. Speaker, this is a fundamental debate about responsibility versus rights. You have the right to smoke, but do you have the right to smoke when young people are present in a confined area where they have to breathe it in? You have a right to smoke, but perhaps you have a responsibility to not smoke in an area where young people are going to be forced to breathe in the second-hand carcinogens.

You have the right to drink, but does that mean you necessarily have the right to drive on Alberta's highways at a blood-alcohol level of .05, putting other people's lives at risk? Perhaps you have the right to drink but the responsibility not to drive on our streets when you've done so, when you're at a level of impairment that can damage other people's lives or put them at risk.

It's a fundamental debate, Mr. Speaker, where people will stand up and say: I have the right to do this. But there is also – and I've debated this among all of my Conservative friends – a responsibility to not harm others while you exercise your rights. That's what makes this such a challenge. I know that some people will argue for their rights. I hope they argue just as vehemently about the responsibilities they have in exercising those rights.

Mr. Speaker, we know that smoking is not a harmless vice. It causes all levels of health care concerns to individuals who do the smoking. We know just as much about second-hand smoke and how dangerous it is as well. There are countless studies that dictate and demonstrate exactly how harmful second-hand smoke is. I've seen videos of the testimonies of spouses who are 70 years old, whose wife or husband passed away 20 years earlier from lung cancer and had never picked up a cigarette or died of heart disease and had never picked up a cigarette, but the spouse that remained alive did smoke and testified: if only they'd known exactly how harmful second-hand smoke was. I heard one spouse say that they wouldn't have been responsible for killing the one they loved the most. That is a very powerful, emotional argument

and demonstrates just what we would do if we knew what kind of harm we caused.

Now, smoking in a vehicle with a young person, Mr. Speaker, is a very confined space. There is no doubt that a young child will inhale second-hand smoke, which we know is dangerous. An adult can stand up and say: "Wait a second. I'm not smoking in the vehicle with you. You pull over and smoke outside." They can debate and protect themselves, but young people can't always do that.

Now, I know that parents or adults would not intentionally want to harm a young person. The majority of people really do want to protect their children or other young people that they have custody or care over, Mr. Speaker, but oftentimes we make decisions without appropriate information. Look; a grown adult who is having a drink at the kitchen table would never – if you told them to pour one-quarter of your drink down the mouth of the child that's sitting beside you for every drink that you have, not a single solitary adult with a bit of common sense would think that was a good idea. But most people fail to realize just how negative, how harmful the health effects are to young people who have to inhale second-hand smoke.

I think the ultimate discussion, the ultimate decision, Mr. Speaker, comes down to whose responsibility it is to protect those young people that would be in a vehicle and forced to inhale second-hand smoke.

The responsibility should be for the adults in the vehicle to not do it. But, Mr. Speaker, if they fail to do that and only when they fail to do that, that's ultimately when it becomes the government's responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves. That's ultimately the core responsibility for the government.

3:30

Again, I don't believe that anybody would deliberately try to hurt someone who's young, a minor, Mr. Speaker, which is why, although I'm going to support this piece of legislation, I encourage our minister of health, our government cabinet and caucus, and every member of this Legislature to continue to push for better education about what the harmful effects are.

It would be wonderful, Mr. Speaker, if we got to a point where everyone had enough information about the harmful effects of second-hand smoke and we as a government didn't need to pass legislation because people did the right thing, because they took the responsibility to protect young people who couldn't protect themselves.

I will be supporting this private member's piece of legislation and continuing to advocate and encourage that we educate all Albertans on just how harmful smoking and second-hand smoke are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise today in the Assembly to speak on Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his initiative in bringing Bill 203 forward as it highlights many important health and social issues.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone in this House would agree that protecting our children is always a priority. Whether it involves their physical or emotional well-being, the safety of our most

vulnerable population undoubtedly deserves our attention, and it's no different when it comes to the effects of second-hand smoke.

The objective of Bill 203 is to make it illegal to smoke in cars whenever anyone under 18 is present. A violation of this bill would result in a maximum fine of \$1,000.

Mr. Speaker, the change in social norms regarding smoking that has taken place over the past decade is quite astounding. Our society went from a place where smoking was quite prevalent to one where the practice is now illegal in many areas such as public places, workplaces, and the entrances of many buildings. Not that many years ago you actually could smoke in a hospital. Moreover, minimal supervision is required to enforce those rules as the rate of compliance is high. People now limit the locations to where they smoke and are conscious of whom they smoke around because they see it as common sense and as a matter of respect.

More recently there's been an increase in the number of studies and reports looking at smoking in vehicles. One of the first studies to examine smoking in cars was done in 2008 by researchers at the University of Waterloo and entitled *An Experimental Investigation of Tobacco Smoke Pollution in Cars*. In this study levels of tobacco smoke pollution, more commonly known as second-hand smoke, were measured in 18 different vehicles.

Drivers smoked a single cigarette in their cars in each of the five controlled air sampling conditions. Each condition varied based on the car's movement, level of air conditioning, and whether the windows were open. With the worst ventilation conditions, windows up and the vehicle parked, the level of the smoke was higher than at most bars that allowed smoking. Under the better ventilated conditions, the side window halfway down and the cigarette held close to the window, the level of smoke was reduced but still posed a significant health risk. The researchers concluded that smoking in a car under any condition may potentially lead to high levels of second-hand smoke.

More recently another study was published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 2011, entitled *Myths, Facts and Conditional Truths: What is the Evidence on the Risks Associated with Smoking in Cars Carrying Children?* While trying to determine the risks involved, the authors first looked at the mixture of chemicals that make up second-hand smoke and its concentration in cars under different conditions such as volume, speed, and ventilation. They also looked at how long a person would be in the car and how long a person would be exposed to second-hand smoke. The difference between how second-hand smoke affects children compared to adults was also considered.

The authors found that the evidence does not show an absolute risk threshold because a range of environmental, biological, and social factors contribute to the risk equation. However, the authors did note that because of the small size of the interior space of a car, during the worst ventilation conditions smoking in a vehicle may constitute a health risk.

Mr. Speaker, the potential health risk posed by second-hand smoke is well documented, and it is clear that smoking within a vehicle poses a risk. Not many people today would refute those findings. However, the fundamental question we may want to ask ourselves while debating Bill 203 is not about the potential danger of second-hand smoke but whether this sort of legislation is the best course of action to mitigate the risk.

This is not to say that governments should be complacent or take no action at all; quite the opposite. As a matter of fact, this province already has a number of health initiatives in place to address this issue. Most of these programs fall under the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. This strategy is a 10-year plan that was developed and implemented in 2002. It set goals and targets for

reducing tobacco use among Albertans as well as methods for achieving those targets.

The goals of this comprehensive strategy relate to three major focus areas: prevention of tobacco use by youth; cessation of tobacco use by adults and youth; and protection of all Albertans, including children, from second-hand smoke. In order to achieve these goals, this strategy focused its efforts on education, collaboration, raising public awareness, and sustainability. By working with various community-based programs such as the National Non-Smoking Week events, these have spread positive information and have taught youth about the dangers of smoking.

The Barb Tarbox campaign, which was very effective in terms of its recall among adolescents, is another example of the multipronged approach of the strategy. By raising public awareness through a mass-media campaign, this innovative approach, which featured a former smoker, was able to garner significant attention and educate many people about tobacco.

As a result of such achievements this strategy and its stakeholders have had much success with respect to its goals. Four out of 5 Albertans do not use tobacco, and there are now more ex-smokers than current smokers. The percentage of youth in Alberta under 18 exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes also decreased by more than 50 per cent from 2001 to 2006. The number of nonsmoking Canadians who report being exposed to cigarette smoke in a private vehicle has also fallen about 25 per cent between 2003 and 2009.

These trends were not simply the result of legislation as the Tobacco Reduction Act was not implemented until 2008. Instead, they are the result of public education and collaboration, that have been successful in changing social norms regarding tobacco use.

Since 2012 is the 10-year anniversary of the plan, Health and Wellness is currently working with tobacco stakeholders across the province to develop a renewed Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. This renewed strategy will be conscious of the need to protect all Albertans from second-hand smoke but will focus on youth, young adults, pregnant women, and at-risk populations.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reiterate that I agree with the intentions of the hon. member in wanting to protect children from second-hand smoke in cars. However, as I've discussed, there are also other approaches that are currently being used with great success.

I'd like to thank the hon. member again for bringing forth this important issue for discussion, and I look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. You wish to join the debate?

3:40

Ms Notley: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to get up and speak to this bill, again because I do believe, as the mover of the bill first noted, this has already been discussed at some length in the Legislature.

I want to say at the outset that this is a bill that I think includes a strategy which outweighs the concerns which are legitimately articulated about it. In short, it is a bill that we would support. I say that understanding that there are some legitimate concerns that people might raise with respect to the degree of sort of government oversight into their life and whether the car is an extension of the home and those kind of arguments, but notwithstanding those arguments I think that we need to be very clear about what's at risk here.

I want to begin by thanking the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat because he did a very good job of quoting a number of important studies which outlined the clear health effects

associated with being exposed to second-hand smoke and, in particular, being exposed to second-hand smoke in a vehicle.

The fact of the matter is that we typically, less so in this province but in most responsible jurisdictions, regulate the exposure of the public in not only public settings but in private settings to hazardous chemicals. Many workplaces are private domains, but we still say that at a certain point you cannot force people to be exposed to chemicals and air quality that jeopardizes their health. It's quite understood that we have a practice in our society where when the health effects reach a certain point, it is considered reasonable and thoughtful to limit the exposure of people to those health effects and thereby limit the right of another person to expose people to those health effects. So it's not new that day in and day out we sometimes limit the rights of one person in order to achieve a better outcome for others.

Now, the fact of the matter is that there's also a lot of literature out there that shows that as we succeed in getting people to move away from smoking, ironically there's a greater income disparity amongst those who smoke and those who do not smoke. More likely than not you're going to have lower income people who are still smoking. More likely than not you're going to have people with lower rates of education who are still smoking. So I'm not unaware of the concern about bringing in this sort of fine/penalty approach against these people because it may actually in some cases make the situation worse.

One of the things I would say about this legislation is that in concert with going forward with this legislation, we need to develop a far more effective and aggressive prevention and cessation program with respect to smoking. Yes, we're all great at putting out advertising. This government advertises up the yingyang. Their favourite thing to do is advertise and educate. But in most cases regulation is that key linchpin of a strategy that makes for real changes.

The other thing that you need to do is that you need to understand that tobacco addiction is an addiction, and we need to be able to provide programs that assist people in breaking that addiction in a way that is nondiscriminatory on the basis of income.

I myself grew up with one parent who smoked, and I tell people the story. We lived about 15 miles out of town, and we would get into the front seat of our three-on-the-tree pickup truck. There would be me, my mom, and my two brothers. We'd be sitting along the bench of the old truck. It would be minus 25 out, so there was no friggging window open, that's for sure. We'd be driving into town, sometimes in second gear because my mom was not necessarily so good at moving us into third gear. She would find a way to smoke three or four cigarettes between the time that we left our place at Dunvegan and got into Fairview.

You know, I'm fully aware that this happened. You know, I love my mother dearly, and she was a very good mother, but at the time the cultural norms of what was acceptable were what they were, and nobody was telling her that that was actually something she could be fined for doing, so she did it.

It was interesting. I was one of those kids, when I was 13 or 14, who was very antismoking, and I was constantly lecturing her about the need for her to quit smoking. Finally, when I was 16, my dad bribed her into quitting smoking and said, "Tell you what; if you quit smoking, we can collectively agree to put this amount of money every month towards the church charity," that she wanted to give the money to, so she agreed to quit smoking. Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, within a month and a half of her quitting smoking, I started. I believe it was because I'd probably been addicted for some period of time because of the amount of exposure to second-hand smoke in our house.

So 15 years later, when I started attempting to quit smoking, I remember being at my workplace, and I was very pleased because they actually paid for these rather expensive smoking cessation programs. That was not something that everybody would have access to. The other thing that helped me quit smoking was the fact that there was a law against me smoking anywhere that was remotely convenient like – oh, should I mention it? – my car. At this point I was in B.C. Now, at that time there was no law against me smoking in my car, but there was a law against me smoking anywhere close to where I was. So that helped me quit smoking. Frankly, I think if there was a law against smoking in your car around children, that would also help people quit smoking.

The final thing that I want to say on this is that at the end of the day kids don't get to choose whether they pick up that cigarette or not. This is not about kids starting smoking when they're 16. This is about a three-month-old baby being exposed to smoke. This is about a four-year-old child being exposed to smoke. They don't get to make that choice. So we need to make sure, just as we would with other situations that put kids at risk, that we as a community step in and say: "You know what? We respect your rights and your role as a family, but at this point we're getting beyond that, which is in the best interest of your child."

Quite frankly, I think being in a truck and smoking four cigarettes with the windows rolled up is probably not a great thing for a child. I'm not suggesting anyone would have said that I shouldn't have still been living with my family, but it would have been helpful if my parents knew that there was actually a price to pay for engaging in that behaviour.

Knowing what we know about the research around the dangers of tobacco smoking, around the addictiveness of tobacco, around the long-term health consequences and the extreme cost to our health care system over the short and the long term, it seems to me quite strange that we wouldn't give very serious consideration to this piece of legislation.

For the sake of prevention, for the sake of our children's health, for the sake of our collective health, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a reasonable bill to consider, and we would support it. We would, though, also suggest that we would accompany support for a bill like this, were our party the one that was running this government, with a much greater investment in prevention programs not only just around preventing smoking but preventing all of those socioeconomic indicators that result in poor health and working on those issues up front to keep people healthy so that we're not paying for it at the greatest expense after the horse has left the barn as it were.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, Mr. Speaker, and look forward to hearing more debate. Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I rise, actually, with a little trepidation to speak to this bill because I know at least one member in this House probably is not going to find my comments all that helpful. So maybe I should start by saying that I actually support the bill.

I wasn't going to at one point. Many, many years ago, back when I first started in this House and this bill was debated, before that hon. member sat in this House, I thought at that time: gosh, you know, can't parents figure this out for themselves? The very next morning I was in the parking lot of the grocery store in Peace River. A car pulled in beside me that had three little kids in it, windows rolled up, and the driver was smoking a big cigar. That just was beyond me, and I myself smoked for many, many years, Mr. Speaker. I guess my kids have things to say about me, I'm sure.

I do recognize the health impacts of smoking, obviously. You know, I think I can support this bill. There were some reasonable

comments made by the members for Battle River-Wainwright and Cypress-Medicine Hat. I think this is a healthy debate.

The reason I wanted to rise today, Mr. Speaker, is because I'm just slightly insulted – well, okay, quite a bit insulted – that that hon. member, who is one of the most partisan members in this House, should rise and implore me to be nonpartisan in supporting his bill. That troubles me very deeply because that member literally rode his horse into the arena on the back of partisanship and has been viciously partisan in this House. For him to stand up and implore me about, you know, how to vote correctly in this House is, quite frankly, an insult.

3:50

To go on as he did, for example, as a doctor discussing the health situation of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, especially seeing how the health situation he referred to has absolutely nothing to do with the subject matter of this bill, I find that a little bit insulting. Perhaps we should ask that hon. member to table his permission slip from the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul that allows him to discuss the health information of that hon. member on the floor of this House. I suspect that'll wind up being tabled when all of that other health information and evidence about the health inquiry that the Health Quality Council went on a goose chase over and that we're still waiting for is tabled.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize for my anger, but I find it insulting that a member like that would implore me to be nonpartisan. I have no problem being nonpartisan. I have no problem voting for what's right and doing what's right. That's why I'm here. I came here to make a difference, and I don't need any lessons from over there.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I will support this bill. I honestly thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. I'll take my seat now, and hopefully the atmosphere will calm down.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you wish to speak on the bill?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I would rise to support Bill 203. I think it is a very good idea. I was surprised to learn that only Alberta and Quebec had failed to provide this type of legislation, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this forward. Certainly, there are many, many examples that hon. members in the past have given, valid examples, as to why this legislation is needed.

You know, there was a time not too long ago in this country, hon. members, when perhaps a large family was in a small car like a Volkswagen. The windows were wound up because we know Volkswagens didn't have very good heaters in those days, and both parents would be smoking, coming home from a family outing. The inside of the car would be virtually blue. That certainly wouldn't be good for the passengers then, and it certainly wouldn't be good for passengers now. The hon. Member for Peace River talked about the gentleman smoking a cigar in a vehicle when he witnessed three children riding along as passengers or arriving at the parking lot of a supermarket. So there are examples.

It certainly is the right thing to do. The cost of this shouldn't be an issue. I think we would see over a long period of time significant savings to our health care budget.

Bill 203 as it stands I think should be passed in this Assembly. Hopefully it won't be like – and I'm going to have to get partisan here – other private members' bills and lie on the legislative shelf like some other bills that we know about, including some that

were to provide tax credits to individuals, but for some reason or other, Mr. Speaker, were not proclaimed and put into force.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to please not only vote for this fine bill, Bill 203, but let's make sure that it becomes the law of this province quickly so that children, when they're driving with their parents in a car, are protected from second-hand smoke and the effects of second-hand smoke. Hon. members, this is a very good bill. It's a good initiative. Let's vote for this and move it forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I concur; this is a good bill. It is a pleasure to rise today to join my hon. colleagues on Bill 203, brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd like to thank him for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, the protection of children is a major priority for this government. Quite simply, children constitute approximately one-quarter of our province's population but all of our future. While I commend any initiatives that make our children safer and while I strongly agree with the premise of the bill, I do have concerns about how this bill would be enforced.

I believe that in framing this issue, it's important to highlight tobacco use trends in our province. In particular, the smoking rate among youth aged 15 to 19 has decreased substantially in recent years, in large part due to our Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. The tobacco reduction strategy is a 10-year plan to increase the wellness of Albertans and to decrease health costs related to tobacco use. This age group, from 15 to 19, is key when you consider that this is typically the demographic with the highest rate of tobacco use.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, Bill 203 targets two main issues. First, it focuses on raising awareness of the negative effects of second-hand smoke, and secondly, it specifically targets adults who smoke in vehicles while minors are present. With this in mind I believe it's important to highlight the fact that levels of smoking are continuing to decline among Alberta's young people, and I believe we're seeing this result because of our tobacco reduction strategy and because it's working.

For the sake of debate, I also think it's important to look at what other jurisdictions are doing with respect to this matter. As many of you are likely aware, there are a number of Canadian jurisdictions that currently have legislation in place that prohibits people from smoking in motor vehicles when minors are present. I imagine that – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark can correct me if I'm wrong – Bill 203 seeks to replicate the initiatives made in some of the Canadian provinces and a handful of American states.

In addition to these jurisdictions, some municipalities in our province have taken a similar approach to Bill 203 and have mandated a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present. Mr. Speaker, Leduc, Athabasca, and Okotoks have all passed these types of bylaws in recent years. According to the city of Leduc, by December of this past year about a dozen warnings have been issued to drivers in the city since its implementation this past summer, but no fines, stated to be \$100, have been handed out.

In addition to Athabasca, Okotoks, and Leduc, the city of Medicine Hat currently is the largest municipality in Alberta that has banned smoking in cars carrying people under the age of 16. Mr. Speaker, I should point out that as of January 4 this year only one ticket for smoking in a vehicle when there were children present has been issued since Medicine Hat's bylaw came into

effect on September 1. I'm not sure if this means that virtually no one in the city of Medicine Hat smokes with children in their vehicles or that the bylaw is too difficult to enforce. But these types of numbers lead me to believe it must be one or the other.

Mr. Speaker, laws such as Bill 203 can be part of provincial legislation. In April 2008 Nova Scotia became the first Canadian province to implement a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present. It's now illegal in Nova Scotia to smoke while anyone under the age of 19 is in a vehicle.

Other Atlantic provinces in Canada – New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador – have also passed similar laws in the last three years. Provincial regulations in both Ontario and British Columbia pertaining to smoking in vehicles carrying children under the age of 16 came into effect in 2009. Those caught committing this type of act in B.C. are subject to a \$109 fine; in Ontario it's up to \$250. Likewise, Saskatchewan and Manitoba introduced this kind of smoking ban in 2010, with Manitoba's fine nearing \$200.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to address various U.S. laws concerning this debate on Bill 203. The southern U.S. state of Arkansas was the first jurisdiction in the world to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children under the age of 16. The fine for committing this offence in Arkansas is \$25. Likewise, Louisiana law bans smoking in motor vehicles when children under the age of 13 are present. Other states like Maine, Oregon, and Hawaii also have similar bans.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is the effectiveness of enforcement of a law like this. We've heard that many jurisdictions have barely issued any charges. I think it's fair to have concern that law enforcement will be spending time pulling over people who have a cigarette in their hand at the expense of other public safety issues that may be more pressing to address.

I acknowledge that the protection of children's health is and should continue to be a priority of this government, and I commend any initiative that makes our children safer.

4:00

I agree with the premise of the bill. I'm still unsure on how to vote on the bill at this time. For these reasons I'm looking forward to my colleagues' opinions on Bill 203 so that we can make a qualified and educated decision on what's in the best interests of Albertans and the children in our province.

Thank you again to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this forward, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Albert, do you wish to join the debate?

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do wish to speak to this bill. I'm very honoured today to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012. Before I share some of my thoughts on this proposed legislation, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this important bill before the House for debate. In his opening remarks he made the comment that we should not have to legislate common sense. I agree a hundred per cent with that statement. Unfortunately, however, sometimes we do have to legislate common sense.

Sometimes it's difficult to enforce common sense, though. I guess, Mr. Speaker, that's where I'm coming from in this debate. It's really difficult to enforce common sense. Bill 203 would make it illegal to smoke in vehicles while minors are present. This

would be accomplished by amending the Tobacco Reduction Act. I have no doubt that every hon. member in this House would agree that smoking in a vehicle with a minor is inadvisable. That being said, there are still a number of factors and variables to consider as we debate this legislation. We must thoroughly examine all of the issues that are relevant if this law were to be implemented here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's been enough research done on this topic to support the claim that subjecting a young individual in an enclosed space to second-hand smoke can cause them health problems – that's not a question – and I appreciate all of the studies that have been referred to in the previous debate. Those studies have shown that smoking in a vehicle produces harmful levels of second-hand smoke even when the windows are down. Not smoking in the presence of children is a nonstarter. As the hon. member says, it's common sense not to smoke in the presence of children, especially in a confined space.

However, one of my concerns regarding Bill 203 is the challenges it would present to law enforcement officials, and that is the topic I will be focusing my comments on today. The issue of enforcement seems to always be raised during debates regarding smoking bans. This is largely due to the fact that in any jurisdiction there are populations of smokers that will be opposed to any type of law restricting their smoking. Because of this, there could potentially be challenges with enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, if this legislation is passed, even with a province-wide educational public awareness program, which I fully support, there will no doubt be individuals who choose not to abide by the new law. With any kind of legislation sometimes even just putting it in legislation becomes the educational tool to emphasize the importance of it, and perhaps enforcement then becomes a minor issue. The enforcement is just the fact that the legislation is there, and people will pay heed to it.

Mr. Speaker, because of this, we need to consider the challenges police might have when dealing with the enforcement of this law. For example, there is a question of allocation of resources for the enforcement of this law. Funding would be needed to inform and train officials so they understand the law and their role in enforcing it on a day-to-day basis. There's also the question of priority. How many police officers would be spending their time pulling vehicles over to issue fines for smoking in a vehicle with a minor?

The latter issue is one of my biggest concerns due to the fact that there are a number of other, more serious situations where a police officer would be needed; for instance, a severe car accident, an impaired driver on the road, or even individuals travelling at an extremely high speed. Someone might argue that the health of our children is even more important, and I won't debate that.

Mr. Speaker, I really do wonder how Bill 203 would affect the way law enforcement officials allocate their time, and that is an issue all hon. members of this House need to consider as well. Bill 203 would indeed require police officers to monitor and enforce such behaviour, which may divert their attention from other public safety issues. This is not to diminish the importance of the safety and health of our youth, but it is one factor we should consider. But the health of our children is primarily the responsibility of the parent, and we expect parents to be responsible. Unfortunately, some aren't.

Another issue that needs to be at the forefront of this debate is how situations would be assessed by police. How are law enforcement officials to know whether or not the individual in a vehicle is a minor? If a younger child were to be in a situation

where one of their parents was smoking in the vehicle with them, the police would not have any difficulties coming to the conclusion that the child in the vehicle is, in fact, a minor.

Alternatively, Mr. Speaker, an individual might be in a vehicle with a driver who is smoking and may appear to be under 18 years of age. If a police officer were to pull them over because he suspects the passenger to be a minor and after checking the identification, if it was available, realizes that the passenger is actually an adult, then that police officer has done his due diligence. However, that police officer could possibly have used that time differently.

Similarly, there is also the scenario where an individual who is under the age of 18 may look older than they actually are. This creates another problem for law enforcement officials. How can police officers identify someone as a minor if they appear as though they are closer to 25 years of age?

In addition, many passengers, minors or not, may be unable to produce the appropriate identification. How would police proceed when they encounter that situation? These are all factors that take valuable police time. Further to that, how would police be able to tell if a passenger is smoking in the back seat of a vehicle if the windows are tinted, which is legal as long as the front windows are not so tinted? Tinted windows would prevent police from seeing into the back seat of a vehicle and would make it difficult for them to assess whether or not someone is smoking or if there is a minor in the back seat. Some smokers may even choose to keep the windows rolled up when smoking with a minor present just to reduce the risk of getting caught.

Because of this, I think this legislation might prove to be challenging to enforce in some situations. There is also the question of a minor smoking in a vehicle with his or her parents. If police were to pull that vehicle over to issue a fine, who would receive it, the parent or the minor?

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, there are a number of factors in this proposed legislation that may prove to be potential difficulties for law enforcement officials. But when the distracted driving legislation was proposed, we were faced with a number of very similar concerns with regard to enforcement. We passed it, and it is being enforced.

Although Bill 203 keeps the health and safety of our youth in mind – and I support that very much – the challenges it presents to police are still very real and need to be thoroughly considered, especially since Alberta's existing tobacco reduction strategy has been and continues to be successful in reducing tobacco use amongst all Albertans. I was somewhat surprised at the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark indicating that we have one of the highest rates of smoking in vehicles in the country. That surprised me.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for all the hard work and effort he has put into this piece of legislation. It speaks of his commitment to public health and safety and also aims to reduce tobacco use in our province, which is always beneficial.

I am certainly in favour of its intent although I do have some concerns about overregulation. Common sense tells you not to smoke in confined spaces in close proximity to children, especially when it's your own children, but you can't legislate against stupidity.

Dr. Brown: Yes, you can.

Mr. Allred: Can you? Sometimes it doesn't work, though.

I always think more consideration needs to be given to the challenges this legislation would present to our law enforcement officials.

From the foregoing, Mr. Speaker, it will be obvious that I am of two minds on this issue, parental rights or parental responsibility.

That being said, I will conclude my comments and urge members to support this bill. Thank you.

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

4:10

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up and debate Bill 203. I must say that I wanted to sit back and listen because I never know which way the government is going to go on legislation. It's good to see the direction the discussion has gone, but I have a few other comments I'd like to make on the partisanship that was discussed a little bit earlier by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

To get into it, I think we'll all agree that we would all prefer to educate rather than legislate. We'd all prefer to inspire rather than require. For myself as an elected representative I felt there were two duties on being elected. One is to protect the life, liberty, and the property of the citizens of the country, and the second one is to pass legislation to protect those who can't protect themselves. This bill falls directly into that category. We need to look at and view: is this something where a citizen of this country is jeopardizing their health or their future because of the actions of someone else? I believe this falls into that category.

Again, many members have gotten up and spoken with a little bit of trepidation because there's going to be some anger out there that we would even consider passing such a piece of legislation, that doesn't leave it in the parents' rights to make that decision for their children.

I just want to comment on a few of the pieces of legislation that we have passed. We're not allowed to drive to town with our children without having them in a seat belt or, if they're small, in a car seat. We're not allowed to go biking with our children without having a helmet on their head. We have many areas that we've looked at, again just the legislation that even adults aren't allowed to drive on their own without having a seat belt on. With all of these we come in and say – and they're not even endangering someone else's life – “Oh, no; this is a hazard, and therefore we're going to legislate it.”

When we look at the many bills that we have passed in order to supposedly legislate common sense, I think that this one is way up on the scale, where we have vulnerable children that aren't able to protect themselves. It's interesting that here in the province people have commented on: how are we going to enforce it, and is it a good use of the officer's time to enforce it? We have a bullying helpline, you know, 1.888.456.2323. That's to help protect our children that are in a situation where they need help. We have a child abuse hotline, 1.800.387.KIDS, or 5437. These are all things that we've put in place wanting to help protect our children and to give them a better future.

To comment a little bit on the dilemma of “Are we overreaching a parent's rights to expose their children to these things?” I don't believe we are. I think that it's interesting that we've come to that point here where everybody so far has gotten up and spoken on this and said that this is common sense, but it wasn't very common a few years ago, when we had this discussion, and it wasn't common back when we passed the legislation to ban smoking in public places. At that time it was also discussed,

saying that we should be protecting our children, yet the government at that time said, “Absolutely not” and spoke out against it.

It's interesting how we've evolved to today, to where this is common sense. Everyone so far, I think, has basically stood up and said that they support this bill. One member said, “Well, I'll kind of wait and see where the discussion goes,” I guess, to decide on how to vote. But it's important that we realize what we are trying to accomplish here, and that is to protect vulnerable children from being exposed to a toxic substance that is going to have an effect on their quality of life going forward though many have been exposed and seem to be fine now. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona seems to be healthy and doing well and gets out for fresh air, walking every day. Good for her for doing that.

I want to revert to a few comments made by the Minister of SRD, where he said that he was insulted for being told not to be partisan on this. One of the things that I've found quite intriguing being in opposition is listening and talking to government members outside of the Legislature when they discuss or speak out against different bills that have been passed, and it is a problem, hon. minister. If you don't think it is – you yourself have gotten up and spoken on things that I know you have questions about. It's interesting that all of a sudden there's free thought and free expression that's able to go on in this province when we have a new leadership debate going on inside government. Two if not many more – well, many of them did – spoke out against Bill 50 and said that they knew that the process was wrong. They knew that it needed to go back to the Alberta Utilities Commission to have them make the decision and do a proper needs assessment. They need to have a competitive bid, yet now the new Premier has said: this is the way we're doing it. That common sense, that common knowledge that we had four months ago seems to have dissipated and is absent in this House.

Many of the members in here on bills 19, 24, and 36 – oh, great pontification in here supporting it, yet we've had Bill 10 come to amend it. We're looking at some more amendments that have gone on where there's been lots of problems on having what I would call the party whip say how people should be voting. To say that it's not a problem that one is insulted on this I think is an insult to Albertans because there are a lot of members in here that, in my opinion, do not represent those who elected them, because the party has said: “Oh, this is the way we have to vote. End of discussion.” That's until, of course, the next leadership election, and then we'll have a short period there.

So to go back to the bill – and I had to respond because government members have brought this up, Mr. Speaker. I see you're kind of edgy on your chair over that, and I understand that, but they're the ones who brought it up and discussed it, therefore needing to have some more discussion on it.

What we're looking at here is the importance of protecting those who can't protect themselves. We want the best for our children, and I think that this has come to the point where society is realizing that this isn't right. We're trying to educate young mothers, you know. One thing is to take folic acid when they're pregnant. We tell them not to drink while they're pregnant. We tell them not to smoke while they're pregnant. This has a major impact on the children. Our schools are being overwhelmed with children with learning disabilities that many experts are linking back to alcohol, tobacco, preemies that have come out prematurely because of various toxins that they may have been exposed to. So anything that we can do to ensure that our kids have their best

opportunity to be all they can be I think is a reasonable thing to look at.

I'd also like to comment a little bit on the fact that this is a good use of a policeman's time. When you look at much of the other common-sense legislation that we have – pulling someone over because they're holding the cellphone, pulling someone over because they don't have a seat belt on, pulling someone over because their child is not in a car seat – I think this jumps ahead of all of those because the children are being exposed, and there is damage being done to them.

The human body is amazing, though. The ability to rebound after being exposed to these things is truly what has probably caused a long delay in saying: is this really that detrimental? George Burns, you know, smoked all of his life, lived to a hundred years of age. Before my time it was a cool thing to do. It was a healthy thing to do. It was a swanky thing to do. Hollywood used to advertise that and show what a wonderful life it was to have that cigarette or that cigar. It's interesting, as we evolve, to realize what is common sense and what isn't.

Then my other concern is that it's always incremental, one step at a time. Do we need to legislate that people have to walk a mile every day because they're healthier? Do we need to legislate that they're only allowed so many grams of sugar or fat? Those are the concerns that those libertarians have out there: where do we stop, and where do we start?

Again, though, I want to go back where this falls into, the category where we need to protect those who can't protect themselves. A little three-month-old baby doesn't have the choice to say: I don't want to be in this car. A three-year-old, a four-year-old doesn't have that choice. So I think that this is fair legislation, one that hopefully we continue to educate Albertans on so fewer and fewer parents seem to feel compelled to say: oh, it's good for them; it's not going to hurt them. We know that it does. We're jeopardizing their future. So it will be interesting to see if we get support on this.

I must make the comment, though, that if it does pass, we've got other protection for children, bills that have passed in this House but have not been proclaimed. The Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act was passed two years ago, Mr. Speaker. It has not yet been proclaimed. That's very disappointing. The Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act was passed in 2009 and also not proclaimed.

The Deputy Speaker: Before the chair continues on with the business, the chair asks for consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

4:20 Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce a very bright young lady, Karen McDonald. She is a director of community services for SAGE, and as you all know, that means Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton. This organization supports seniors in Edmonton by providing housing and guardianship services. They provide important information, resources that seniors need. They assist with government forms. They help manage seniors' Safe House. They offer a broad range of programs and activities and courses. They provide volunteer

opportunities performing social work services and engaging in advocacy on behalf of seniors. I'd ask Karen to stand and please be recognized by the Assembly. Thank you for all you do.

Mr. Speaker, Karen and her colleagues at SAGE do outstanding work for the seniors of this province. Thank you.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is any other member wishing to speak on Bill 203?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close the debate.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all the hon. members who have stood up and spoken to the bill. Thank you for your honest opinion. I close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now put the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:22 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Griffiths	Mitzel
Allred	Groeneveld	Notley
Berger	Hancock	Oberle
Boutilier	Hinman	Prins
Brown	Horne	Quest
Campbell	Jacobs	Sandhu
DeLong	Johnson	Sherman
Denis	Johnston	Swann
Doerksen	Liepert	VanderBurg
Elniski	Lund	Weadick
Forsyth	MacDonald	Xiao
Goudreau		

Totals: For – 34 Against – 0

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour for me to rise today to introduce Bill 204, the Land Statutes (Abolition of Adverse Possession) Amendment Act, 2012, in second reading debate.

Bill 204 seeks to remove all reference to the legal doctrine of adverse possession from Alberta's legislation in order to ensure that it is no longer grounds for land claims. Adverse possession, sometimes referred to as squatters' rights, enables a trespasser

who has been in possession of land without legal title for a specified period of time to be recognized as the legal owner. I brought this idea forward in the fall sitting as Motion 507, which the Assembly agreed to, and I'm very happy to now have the opportunity to introduce it as a bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'm bringing this bill forward because I truly believe that adverse possession has no place in Alberta legislation. If passed, Bill 204 would ensure that adverse possession would no longer constitute a legal basis for possessors to take title to land that does not belong to them. Currently in Alberta if a person possesses land that does not belong to them for 10 or more years, they may legally claim title to the property. The doctrine of adverse possession in Alberta has led to approximately 100 reported court cases in the course of our 106-year history, very few of which have been successful. The low rate of success in these cases relates to the fact that Alberta has a very efficient land titles system, with accurately marked boundaries, quite different from that used in England, where the doctrine of adverse possession originated.

As you may remember from my comments during the last session, the law of adverse possession was adopted in the late 19th century, when Alberta, then part of the Northwest Territories and originally part of Rupert's Land, was purchased by the Dominion of Canada. At that time we adopted the laws of England. The criteria used to decide which laws we would appropriate included the question of whether or not the law was applicable within the local context. Mr. Speaker, after a significant amount of research, it is my opinion that adverse possession was never applicable within the Alberta context and should not have been adopted by the courts in the first instance. I say this because although Alberta did adopt a number of laws and procedures from England at that time, we did not adopt the same land tenure system as was used in England.

Historically land tenure in England was based on boundaries indicated by general markers such as hedges, fences, and ditches. This is known as a general boundary system. As such, it was difficult to determine in any precise manner the true boundaries of a plot of land, and property disputes were common. Given that context, Mr. Speaker, it is easy to understand why England established the doctrine of adverse possession. In the absence of well-documented surveys, the court could resort to adverse possession, arguing that the possessor had lived on that land for several years without being asked to leave and, therefore, could retain the land as their own. The doctrine effectively limited the period of time during which a landowner could reclaim their land, thereby incenting them to be aware of the extent of their property.

But, Mr. Speaker, Alberta did not adopt England's land tenure system. Instead, we adopted the Torrens system of land registration, which originated in Australia in the 1850s. Under the Torrens system the title to land in Alberta is registered and guaranteed by the province based on accurately surveyed parcels monumented on the ground prior to the grant of title by the Crown. To this day the extent of a person's title is determined by those survey monuments, a measure which protects landowners from much unjustified loss of property.

In contrast to England's general boundary system, western Canada has a fixed boundary system where the boundaries were established prior to grants being issued to homesteaders for their lands. These grants were based on quarter sections defined by survey monuments on the ground. By reliance on this system, Alberta has avoided countless property disputes between neighbours, and in cases where disputes do arise, landowners can easily resolve the problem by verifying the original survey.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the issue that adverse possession was meant to resolve in England never actually existed in Alberta.

In Alberta we had a system of survey before settlement as opposed to the English system of settlement before survey. Yet the Alberta courts adopted the doctrine of adverse possession, relying on a case from British Honduras, that was upheld by the Privy Council in England. The British Honduras case decided that limitations law, which is what adverse possession is, could coexist in a guaranteed land registration system such as the Torrens system.

4:40

Unfortunately, however, Mr. Speaker, the early court actions did not argue the applicability of the adoption of English land tenure and only argued the question of the application of adverse possession in a Torrens system of guaranteed title. I am certain, even though I can only speculate, that if the case had been argued on the application of the North-West Territories Act amendment of 1886, the early cases in Alberta would have been decided differently, and that would have saved Alberta landowners 100 years of grief.

The doctrine does not offer any real benefit to Albertans; in fact, it has caused a number of difficult legal challenges in the past. For example, Mr. Speaker, in 1965 the city of Calgary lost numerous plots of land to an adverse possession claim, and in 1993 irrigation districts also lost land in two adverse claims. After witnessing the problematic conclusion of these cases, the Legislative Assembly amended Alberta legislation to ban future adverse possession claims against municipalities and irrigation district lands. These amendments made abundant sense under the circumstances. By passing Bill 204 and abolishing adverse possession completely, we will afford the same protection to private landowners that municipalities and irrigation districts already enjoy.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, an action for adverse possession in 1948 that deprived a landowner of some significant improvements resulted in an amendment to the Land Titles Act, which is now entrenched in the Law of Property Act, that is very beneficial to Albertans and, in fact, has been copied in other provinces as well. Section 69 of the Law of Property Act enables a landowner who mistakenly builds lasting improvements on a neighbour's land to lay a claim to that land so that they do not lose their investment. The legislation, however, requires the landowner to pay compensation to the true landowner for the land lost.

This, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion is fair and just and in keeping with Alberta's spirit of justice. This is excellent legislation because unlike adverse possession, it protects both the legal owner of the land as well as the neighbour who built on it by mistake. Section 69 of the Law of Property Act adequately solves the common problem of building encroachments. Knowing that the law of lasting improvements is in place, we can rest assured that the abolition of adverse possession will certainly not leave a gap in our legislation. Instead, it will make room for more modern and relevant laws to protect Alberta landowners and bring us in conformity with all other Canadian Torrens jurisdictions that currently ban adverse possession.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to say that Alberta has one of the best land tenure systems in the world, based on accurate land surveys and titles that are guaranteed by the government. Because of this there is no need to limit a landowner's ability to reclaim land claimed by a trespasser. Should a dispute arise, ownership claims can easily be proven through government-registered surveys. I believe that by eliminating the common law doctrine of adverse possession, we will further improve our excellent land tenure system. While this bill may not impact all Albertans, it will make an important difference to every landowner, who can now be assured that their boundaries are protected and can be determined by lawful means.

As such, I would strongly encourage all of my hon. colleagues to vote in support of Bill 204, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise to speak to Bill 204. Bill 204 seeks to remove all reference to the legal doctrine of adverse possession from Alberta legislation in order to ensure that it's no longer grounds for land claims. As I understand it, adverse possession, sometimes referred to as squatters' rights, is a law that Alberta adopted from England in the 19th century. Adverse possession enables a neighbour to acquire legal ownership of a piece of land should they occupy it continually for at least 10 years without being asked by the true owner to vacate the area.

It's understandable that the hon. member would want to eliminate this legal doctrine. As we've heard just previously from the member but also in the debate on Motion 507 last session, the doctrine has been used as grounds for land claims in about a hundred recorded cases in our 106-year history. Overall there is a very compelling case to be made that adverse possession is no longer a valid doctrine in our legal system.

Our provincial legislation has a long-standing history, and it's important that we continually review and revise it to ensure that it meets the needs of our residents and of today's times. That's precisely what the Member for St. Albert is doing here today, evaluating the modern-day value of this law that stems back a hundred years. I want to thank the member for raising this, and I will be supporting it.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise in support of this bill, one that the hon. member educated me on just a couple of weeks ago. It was entirely a surprise to me to learn that this ancient tradition, known as adverse possession, continued in Alberta. Since then I've learned something about it. I don't claim to be an expert, but it seems eminently sensible that owners of property should not have anything usurped simply on the basis of occupation or squatting or personal advantage taken of this ancient tradition.

I've never run across the issue, and I guess many of the members here have not run across this specific example in their own personal lives or that of family or friends, but obviously given the information we've had around this bill and the fact that it's been used in many different parts of the province over these years speaks to the need for change. Certainly, I will be supporting it. It's eminently sensible and forward looking and updates us in terms of our property rights and ownership rights in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't expecting to do my closing.

Just a few closing remarks. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View indicated that he had not encountered adverse possession. In speaking to some of my other colleagues, some of them have. I admit it's a very rare instance. As was indicated by

the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, there have only been about a hundred reported cases in Alberta in the 106 years of our history, but there are a number of cases that go unreported, and if they're not challenged in court, they don't go to court. I know there are a couple of cases currently in southern Alberta, but I don't know that they will go to court. Sometimes they're settled out of court, and they don't get reported.

It is a very difficult law, and as I indicated, we are the only Torrens jurisdiction in Canada that has adverse possession. Even in England, where the law came from in 1870, they have now passed legislation – I believe it was in 2002 – which will abolish adverse possession after a 12-year period, I believe. So it is becoming obsolete even in the country that originally invented it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I was going to make a motion that we proceed with Motion 503. I don't want to say why I cannot do that because that would contravene another rule of the House, so I would presume that under the standing orders we will adjourn for 10 minutes.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned from 4:50 p.m. to 5 p.m.]

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Tax Incentives for Cultural Endeavours

503. Mr. Benito moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the feasibility of creating tax incentives to support cultural endeavours.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 503. I am proposing this motion because I believe we should further explore the possibility of creating tax incentives in support of cultural endeavours. It is no secret that we are a very tax-friendly jurisdiction and that culture plays a significant part in the fabric of our province.

As you know, Alberta is a very multicultural province and is rich in cultural diversity. Culture is increasingly acknowledged as a necessary element of a healthy and balanced society. Many studies indicate that participating in cultural activities helps reduce stress, promotes increased health, and improves academic learning. What I propose with Motion 503 is to start a discussion that could lead to increased support of multiculturalism in Alberta and also to various cultural endeavours in the province. Mr. Speaker, a vibrant culture also gives our province an important advantage as we compete to attract and retain skilled workers and their families to our communities. I think we can all agree that our communities are also strengthened through cultural activity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly comment on our cultural policy, the Spirit of Alberta, and speak to how I believe it has set the groundwork for Motion 503. The Spirit of Alberta was developed in early 2008 and is the result of research and consultation with Albertans, cultural organizations and foundations, other jurisdictions, and various ministries in the provincial government. In these consultations Albertans have expressed a desire for culture to be a priority and for the government to play a lead role in creating and sustaining the conditions in which culture can flourish. Albertans have also said that government should

work in partnership with other levels of government, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, other stakeholders, and individuals.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the input of Albertans into these consultations shows how involved and important Albertans view culture in our province. A recent survey indicated that 97 per cent of Albertans believe it is important for every child in Alberta to learn about the culture of the province. The cultural sector itself represents approximately 3 per cent of both the province's GDP and the province's employment. In 2010 more than 90 per cent of Albertans said that they had attended, participated, or performed in an arts and culture event or activity in the past year. Obviously, that means that millions of Albertans are either involved in or attend a cultural event each year. A large majority of Albertans, roughly 91 per cent, say that arts and culture activities are very or at least somewhat important in contributing to the overall quality of life in their community.

I believe that these types of cultural activities and events are very important and that they should be supported by Albertans in a financial capacity by way of tax incentives. While I acknowledge that there currently are tax incentives available for those who donate to cultural organizations that are registered as charitable organizations, I feel that as a province we can offer more.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer just a few more points as to what I view as the strength of Motion 503. I feel that this motion could raise awareness of cultural organizations and activities in Alberta, which could garner more support from Albertans. I also feel that Motion 503 could further enhance charitable giving among Albertans. I do not wish to propose anything too dramatic or unrealistic. I believe Motion 503 to be a very moderate and realistic step towards raising awareness of the great cultural organizations and events in our wonderful province. They should be able to rely on our continuing support.

With that, I would like to invite my colleagues to join in the discussion on Motion 503. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing forward a motion that I believe is very much well intentioned. You know, the cultural communities of our province certainly play a very, very important role in the societal fabric of our great province, whether they be those cultural endeavours that have long been the traditions of this province or those of new people coming to our province from other areas of the country or other countries in the world. Certainly, as our province becomes more and more diverse, we as Albertans are going to become more and more exposed to some of the cultural differences that are out there, and for that our lives are definitely more enriched.

However, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I necessarily support this motion. I don't think I will be, mainly for one reason. The Minister of Finance has talked significantly about, you know, the need for a long-term fiscal framework in this province where we evaluate what we're spending money on, how much money we're saving, what we do with nonrenewable resource revenue, and, of course, as the minister has indicated, our overall tax structure. I think that this should be more a conversation that happens as part of that. The reason why I believe that is that there's sort of, I guess, a hierarchy of decisions that you have to do when you talk about implementing tax policy, and that's essentially what this is.

First, the main thing that taxes are in place for is the obvious: we collect tax revenue in order to pay for the public services that the government needs to deliver to its citizens. That should always

be the main purpose of our taxes, to collect those and make sure that what we're required to provide to the public is paid for through the collection of taxes. That can be done in a myriad of different ways. Of course, we know that there are sales taxes, income taxes, property taxes, payroll taxes, all sorts of types of taxes.

The second thing that must be considered when implementing tax policy, Mr. Speaker, is to minimize the economic burden that collecting that revenue might have on future economic development and growth of the economy and future prosperity. That's a very, very important consideration. We do know that in some circumstances, some taxes could be better for incenting certain economic activity or development.

The third thing, and what this member is getting at, is that tax policy certainly can be used to incent certain behaviour or certain policy choices within certain areas. We've seen through this House tax credits for physical activity. We've seen tax credits for incenting certain types of things, in this case investment into our cultural communities.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I will not support this motion at this time is that I believe that the Minister of Finance, in some of his conversations around building a long-term fiscal framework, will include what this member is talking about. My real concern is that if you talk to any economist, they will say that the best type of tax structure is a low, broad-based tax structure, one where you don't have all of these different incentives and credits being provided to every sort of niche or group or whatever but keep the basic rate of taxes low so that we can incent economic activity that way. That's something that I believe this government has done particularly well over the last 40 years, and that's something that I would like to see this government do. That's why I think this conversation about the incenting of a certain segment of the sector needs to actually be held in the broader conversation that the Minister of Finance has indicated is going to happen when we discuss our long-term fiscal framework.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to sit down and let other members join the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 503, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. This motion urges the government to consider the feasibility of creating tax incentives to support cultural endeavours in Alberta.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, as a past minister responsible for culture and community spirit and the MLA for Dunvegan-Central Peace I can attest that Albertans take great pride in the culture that has been fostered in this province. They have also expressed a desire for culture to be a top priority in Alberta as we move forward. That means that this government must play a lead role in creating and sustaining the conditions where diversity can thrive.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta boasts a number of cultural events and gatherings every year in hundreds of our communities. There are also numerous individuals and groups and organizations that are committed to supporting and expanding a vibrant cultural environment in Alberta. This government recognizes that supporting our cultural mosaic is a top priority, and that's why there are provisions in place to offer financial assistance to those who positively contribute to Alberta's culture.

Today I want to focus my comments on incentives and other grants that the provincial government currently makes available to support culture in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, in our great province Albertans have the pleasure already of tax advantages unlike any other jurisdiction in Canada. Because of this, everyone living in Alberta already enjoys the benefit of paying lower taxes. While many other jurisdictions in Canada primarily use tax credits to support cultural and creative industries such as film, television, book and magazine publishing, and sound recording, our province utilizes a different approach. Again, I remember as a past minister that instead of providing greater tax incentives to individuals, organizations, and groups to support cultural activities, our province offers already a number of grants through a variety of provincial programs.

For example, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts provides grant funding to artists, art organizations, and festivals to promote arts and culture right across the province. All eligible artists and organizations are encouraged to apply for those grants, and funding can be provided for both very project-specific activities and annual operating grants. In addition, Alberta's Historical Resources Foundation also has existing grant programs. It assists in the preservation and interpretation of Alberta's heritage by providing financial and technical assistance to heritage preservation initiatives. Another example is the Alberta multimedia development fund, which offers grant programs for screen-based media production, book and magazine publishing, and sound recording. These grants are designed to assist in the development of a strong and competitive cultural industry sector in our province.

In addition to those I have mentioned, there are several other provincial foundations and programs that offer financial support for our cultural organizations.

As I mentioned earlier, there are numerous ways individuals, groups, and organizations can secure funding to preserve and advance culture in our province, but there are also some tax credit offsets that are available in Alberta to help support culture. In Alberta many cultural organizations are also registered as charitable organizations with the Canada Revenue Agency, and as such those organizations are already eligible for the combined federal and provincial charitable donations tax credit that offsets 50 per cent of donations over \$200 in one tax year. On the first \$200 donated the organization receives a 10 per cent provincial tax credit in addition to a 15 per cent federal tax credit. As of January 2007 charitable donations exceeding \$200 are eligible for a 21 per cent provincial tax credit in addition to the 29 per cent federal tax.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's approach to supporting the province's creative and cultural industries has been successful, and a variety of funding and grant options are available.

To conclude my comments, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for his commitment to the preservation and advancement of culture in Alberta and also for bringing this motion before the House for debate. I do agree with the hon. member that culture has great significance in our province. Right now I'm not sure if a greater tax incentive is the best way to continue to support cultural activities in Alberta considering that the current system is working quite well, but I'm receptive to the ideas put forth with Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to stand and give comments that I hope will reflect the majority of

the wishes of the constituents in our area of Little Bow. As many of you are aware, there's a rich history and many different cultures and groups coming to this province, and my comments are more from an historical perspective. I think that this could be a good discussion to have. There isn't any question about whether or not we should have tax incentives. I also believe that we already have had great strides made by people that have come to this province to be Albertans and to be Canadians.

If I could speak personally about it, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of groups that came to our area years ago to homestead. They came from many different countries. My best friend's parents came from Czechoslovakia. There were no programs available. There were no cultural activities. And what you saw was what you could relish and see in their homes, whether it was the few trinkets that they'd been able to save from their previous homeland, and they were very proud of it, but nobody had the ability at that time nor today to preserve that kind of thing except that they did it on their own.

I know that many of the people that came here from other countries – the Dutch Canadians are a very prideful bunch. To this day in Little Bow there'll be groups of hundreds that celebrate annually their freedom and comment on the things that happened after the Second World War when their villages were liberated, and they do it on their own, without any tax dollars, because they're proud and happy to have been liberated by the Canadian armed forces. They do their celebrations on their own, on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that cultural activities and events are very important, but I believe there are other ways that they can be supported by Albertans without taxpayer incentives. The Historical Resources Foundation is one truly good one that has been around for a long time that helps identify and preserve these kinds of valuable additions that have been made by many cultures, by many groups, and by many individuals.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, although I understand the intent of this motion by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, I don't believe that tax incentives are necessarily the way to go. I believe that through continual celebration, events that happen today will continue to happen just for the fact that they have a profile of their own. If I might point out, this Saturday morning at 11 o'clock in Carmangay, Alberta, there will be the shortest Irish St. Patrick's Day parade in the world. There's never been a dollar put into it, but everyone comes down. We're getting people coming from a 60-mile radius, and they have GlobalTV and a free Irish coffee afterwards. This wouldn't have happened if it was a tax incentive-driven program because everyone would be using the program to get the dollars rather than just to celebrate something that would come naturally and be something to be proud of.

With those few comments, I'll sit down and thank again my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this forward for discussion. But I don't think many constituents in my riding are happy to spend tax dollars on this in a direct way. They'd rather do it in a voluntary way.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it seems that culture is so important to the very fabric of our lives. Just in the last little while there's been a couple of events that I've gone to. I'm lucky enough to have the Calgary Irish cultural club in my constituency, so I was lucky enough to be there on Saturday night and join in the early festivities. The camaraderie and the

close friendships that are developed there are so valuable to our community.

Another event that I was at recently was the launching of the second historical book for Bowness. This has been an enormous success, and they have been selling literally thousands of these great big beautiful books. Everyone just loves them. They spend hours and hours reading them. This is the Bowness Historical Society, and it is really the history of the culture that we have had in this little town since the turn of the last century. It's a very valuable part of our community, and it gives the deep roots to our community that add so much more meaning to our lives. Culture is so important to us, yet the way that it comes up, you know, is through the people, where people are getting together, they're supporting each other and coming together. Yes, sometimes they do come to the government for a little bit of money. These books that have been produced have a little bit of government money in them, but it's mostly the work of the people and the little bit of money that they collect.

5:20

I think that it is working so well now. You know, the richness of our communities is coming up through the grassroots, through the actual people. Even though it is so extremely important that we have this culture, I do believe that the way it's working now, where you have just ordinary Joe Blow stepping forward and getting together with like-minded people, is so effective, and I do believe that we should be continuing as we are.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton- Mill Woods to close the debate.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and offer closing remarks on Motion 503. If Motion 503 is agreed

to, it could demonstrate that the government of Alberta is supportive of multiculturalism and cultural endeavours in the province. This motion could also provide a platform to highlight the Alberta tax advantage.

The goal of Motion 503 is to start a discussion surrounding the creation of tax incentives in support of cultural endeavours in our province. This could lead to increased support for multiculturalism in Alberta and also the various cultural endeavours in our province. As I indicated in my opening speech, our province is rich in cultural diversity. This gives us vibrant culture, an important advantage as we compete to attract and retain skilled workers and their families to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that cultural activities and events are very important and that they should be supported by Albertans in a financial capacity. We can further encourage Albertans to do so by way of tax incentives. I also feel that by introducing this motion, we raise awareness of cultural organizations and activities in the province, which could garner even more support from Albertans.

I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding Motion 503. Again, I would like to thank everyone who participated in this motion's debate today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the Deputy Government House Leader, I just want to remind our Assembly that the policy field committees will reconvene tonight at 6:30 for consideration of the main estimates of Transportation and Agriculture and Rural Development.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are finished today's business, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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