



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Jansen	Towle
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McDonald	Vacant
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Cao	Webber
Casey	Xiao
Fenske	Young
Fraser	Vacant
Hale	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Almighty God, guide us so that we may use the privilege given to us by Albertans to be their representatives in this Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think clearly, and the conviction to act and speak without prejudice. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my honour and my privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. François Ouimet, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Quebec, and Mr. Richard Daignault, the Quebec Assembly's interparliamentary relations director. The Deputy Speaker and Mr. Daignault are here to meet with you today. They have already risen, and I would like the Assembly to give them the warm and traditional welcome. Bienvenue.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you two school groups that are here from Whitecourt-St. Anne. First, I'll ask the group from Darwell to please rise and be recognized by my colleagues here in the Legislature and our guests from Quebec as well. They're 18 of the brightest, young, enthusiastic citizens of Whitecourt-St. Anne, and I really appreciate their coming to visit us here today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the other group that we have here is from the Grasmere school, and they're equally as bright and equally as enthusiastic and equally as smart. I even had the chance to talk to a number of them. I'll have the opportunity with their pictures to go back to their classes and talk about local politics, provincial politics, and federal politics. They're all very, very interested because they're studying that right now in social studies. On behalf of everybody here, thank you, and I'd like to introduce you to all my colleagues here and our guests from Quebec.

Thank you.

Mr. Lemke: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of students and teachers from the Forest Green school. They participated in a guided tour of the Legislature and had the opportunity to observe the members in this House, as they are doing right now. I hope these students enjoy their legislative experience. I would like to thank the teachers and parent helpers here today and would like to acknowledge them. If they could please stand when I say their name. The parents are Mrs. Jackie O'Shea, Mrs. Mary Jane Buchholtz, Mrs. Krystal Hoople, Ms Cindy Woolford, and the teacher is Miss Lisa Aronyk. If the students would all stand to be recognized.

Thank you very much.

Mr. McDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group from the Rosedale Christian school located in the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Accompanying these very bright and very tall individuals is Mr. Ross Wiebe, their teacher. Please, could I have them stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 10 students, one teacher, and one parent from Holy Trinity school in Olds. The teacher is Miss Jasper Moe, and the parent helper is Mrs. Kara Coates. Holy Trinity opened in September of 2010 and currently has 107 students ranging from pre-K to grade 7. Joining us today are the students in grade 6. I would invite the students and teachers to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

Ms Kubinec: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three very important people in my life. Seated in the public gallery, first and most importantly, is my husband, Tim Kubinec, and two very dedicated, hard-working campaign people who helped out so much during the campaign.* I would like to thank them for their support both now and during the election. I ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three employees of the Hardisty Care Centre as well as Mark Wells, a senior communications adviser with AUPE. Corrie Cruz, Paramjeet Mrahar, and Jerzy Borysewicz are just three of the employees currently in negotiation with Park Place Seniors Living, a private health care company out of British Columbia. They're currently being paid less than the Alberta Health Services standard despite the company receiving generous subsidies from the government. This dispute is just one example of how for-profit, private health care can not only leave patients with inadequate care and staff underappreciated but leaves ample room for employers to take advantage of employees, their families, and the taxpayer. I ask my guests to rise, and I ask all members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you two great Albertans, Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop. I'll ask them to rise as I tell their story. At their own expense these two courageous Albertans have fought for 10 years, since their first stakeholder submission on farm workers' rights to the Marz commission in 2002. They stand before us today yet again to beseech the government to honour their commitment to paid farm workers for basic rights, mandatory WCB, occupational health and safety standards, and child labour standards; simply, inclusion and equality for paid farm workers. Let's give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guests

* The following names were not read into the record: Norman and Anita Kitz.

David Froelich and Akram Shamie. David and Akram are with Teamsters, local 987, representing over 800 taxi drivers working for Greater Edmonton Taxi Service. The drivers chose to unionize last year and are currently bargaining towards their first agreement. They're hoping that the bargaining process will achieve their objectives. I would now ask David and Akram to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guest Annie Lelievre. Annie is a journeyman scaffolder and has been a resident of Fort McMurray for over 30 years. On December 31, 2011, tragedy struck as her son was killed in a car crash on notorious highway 63. This January Annie set up a Facebook page to demand that the government twin highway 63 as soon as possible in order to help prevent further tragedies like the one she has had to endure. As of today over 6,900 people have joined the page. I would now like to ask Annie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you a young man I've gotten to know quite a bit over the last several years. Chris Carlile, who's a constituent of mine, is a bright young man who's going to be working in my office over the summer as an intern.

Chris grew up in the constituency of Calgary-North Hill, which is now Calgary-Klein, in the community of Highwood and attended James Fowler high school in the constituency. Mr. Speaker, Chris actually took over managing my campaign halfway through the election in some very unfortunate and difficult circumstances and did an exceptional job while he was in the middle of writing final exams for his third-year political science course at the University of Calgary. For that I'm very, very grateful to him. I'd ask Chris to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Seniors' Accommodation Standards

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta seniors and families are frustrated by the shell game that this government is playing with their care. The government doesn't seem to know how many long-term care beds, lodge beds, or continuing care beds they have.

Yesterday the game continued in the Assembly with the Minister of Health. When asked about staff-to-senior ratios in continuing and long-term care centres, he avoided the question. He said that the standards are public, that it's all in the regulations and legislation. Then he went further to say that he wouldn't answer any more questions on this matter. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, a minister of the Crown refusing to answer questions.

Does the minister think it's fair for 40 seniors to have one staff member? How about 60? How about 140? Is it fair to put high-needs seniors, who should be in a nursing home, into an assisted living facility?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I looked through the regulations and legislation for staff-to-senior ratios and didn't find them. I looked

through the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Not there. I looked through the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act regulations. Not there. I looked through the Nursing Homes Act and its regulations. Not there.

I ask the minister to show me the regulations. Show me the legislation with staff ratios. Show me the licensing act. Show me the accommodation standards and regulations. Minister, table it in the Legislature tomorrow for all Albertans to see. Albertans deserve to know.

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

Red Deer Optimist Rebels

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize a group of extraordinary young hockey players who exemplify the very meaning of teamwork and resiliency, the national midget triple A champions, the Red Deer Optimist Rebels. This is a remarkable team that overcame incredible adversity to become Red Deer's first-ever midget triple A national Telus Cup champions.

Going into the third period in the final game, the Red Deer Optimist Rebels were losing by four goals. In a nail-biter of a hockey game Red Deer was able to score an unprecedented four goals to tie the national championship game. The Red Deer Rebels scored in overtime to defeat the team from Quebec, les Phénix du Collège Esther-Blondin to become the national champions. [interjection] I tried.

In doing so, they won Red Deer's very first midget triple A national championship and one of Red Deer's finest hockey moments. This was truly an astounding accomplishment, and I would like to congratulate the team, the coaches, and the management, starting with captain Brady Bakke, Dasan Sydora, Matthew Zentner, Kolton Dixon, Kirk Johnson, Jonathan Finnigan, Stefan Danielson, Cole Berreth, Tanner Lomsnes, Nick Glackin, Joel Topping, Logan Fisher, Dylan Thudium, Brendan Dennis, B.J. Duffin, Rory Davidson, Ty Mappin, Scott Ferguson, Scott Feser, and Quinn Brown; the coaches and management: Doug Quinn, Tricia Bakke, Rob Hamill, Dion Zukiwsky, Al Parada, Peter Friestadt, and Lee Sherback.

These players and coaches serve as an example to us all that hard work in the face of adversity can overcome all challenges. Congratulations on your great victory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Skills Canada National Competition

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize an outstanding organization and the excellent event they put on earlier this month. From May 13 to 16 our Expo Centre came alive as 500 young people from across Canada competed in the 18th annual Skills Canada National Competition. This trade and technology challenge offered competitors the opportunity to showcase their talents in over 40 disciplines, including welding, cooking, and robotics.

Skills Canada is a nonprofit organization consisting of educators, students, employers, labour groups, and government representatives that promotes careers in skilled trades and technologies. As a former vocational teacher myself I know that organizations like Skills Canada are so valuable to our communities. They help our students build relationships, become aware of career options, and learn the competencies necessary to succeed. I have had the opportunity and the good fortune of being a judge in

this exciting and interesting competition, and this year I was honoured to speak at the closing ceremony.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier has often spoken about the value of skilled trades and innovation in our province, and our government has championed trades as an excellent career choice for our young people. As such, I would like to commend Skills Canada and their local chapter, Skills Canada Alberta, for fostering such a sense of pride, excellence, and community among these professionals. Finally, I offer my sincere congratulations to the gold, silver, and bronze winners and all other competitors for their achievements. They have a very bright future ahead of them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Potential Oil Well Site in Calgary-North West

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December of last year an oil and gas exploration company was granted approval from the Energy Resources Conservation Board to drill an exploratory well near the community of Royal Oak in my constituency of Calgary-North West. It is slated to be the site of a sweet oil well, and work has been planned for sometime this July.

After extensive protest from nearby residents the company responsible for drilling the well voluntarily suspended operations pending an ERCB review, which will likely come this summer. A significant number of local residents are opposed to the well site due to concerns about the well and its proximity to homes and businesses in the community. Considering that the well site near the Royal Oak community could potentially be in operation for 50 years, local residents could be living and operating their businesses within a few hundred metres of the well site for quite some time.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it would be beneficial for our province to have urban policies in place that would govern the exploration and development of natural resources within densely populated areas. Doing so would help balance the development of natural resources within urban areas while keeping the concerns of local residents and communities in mind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. opposition leader.

Provincial Response to Oil Sands Criticism

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy industry is under attack. Federal NDP leader Thomas Mulcair is openly deriding the oil sands, that are expected to bring \$3.3 trillion into Canada's economy. Mulcair arrives in Alberta shortly. Of course, the truth puts a lie to Mr. Mulcair's claims. The Kearn oil sands plant, for instance, will start up this year producing no more emissions than a refinery producing a conventional barrel of crude. This is the story the Redford government is not telling Canadians. Wildrose stands tall for development that showcases environmental stewardship. Why is the PC government abandoning Albertans by backing away from confronting a bully?

1:50

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. As a matter of fact, as we're sitting today right now in this Chamber, our Premier is discussing a Canadian energy strategy with western Premiers. As a matter of fact, I will be meeting with the federal leader of the NDP opposition and illuminating him on

facts of Canadian economy and the role of the oil sands not only in this province but nationally and internationally. This government has stood very strong on responsible development of Alberta resources and will continue to do that. We don't need to take lessons from those people across the aisle.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why were Albertans, then, left for three days to rely on Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall to call a spade a spade and face down Mr. Mulcair after his first attack? The Premier may be off wining and dining the western Premiers today, but why is this Premier always the last one to the defence of our oil sands?

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's customary to not refer to the presence or absence of members during your questions.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, one thing that the Leader of the Opposition may learn is that leadership depends on actually taking a leadership role and not following the debate of politicians from other provinces or other parts of the country and simply making inflammatory remarks. This province has a very clear record of being supportive of responsible development of natural resources in this province, and we will continue to do so.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why has the Premier said that she may meet with Mr. Mulcair but that her Deputy Premier will likely go instead? The federal NDP leader has taken the time to come here to see the oil sands first-hand. Why has the Premier not made meeting Mr. Mulcair a priority? What could be more important?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I don't know if I should take that as a slight, Mr. Speaker. I think Mr. Mulcair will enjoy meeting with me. I will present him with all the facts that he requires to formulate a better-informed opinion, and he will be very well served by this visit. I'm actually looking forward to meeting with him.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second main question. The Official Opposition leader.

Cancellation of Jubilee Auditoria Performances

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when asked in this House about her government's abrupt and unfair cancellation of Calgary and Edmonton Shen Yun performances, the Premier said that it was because of "a safety issue." Perhaps she now realizes that she was mistaken. This was not about a safety issue at all. The safety issue in Calgary, the Shen Yun group says, could have been resolved, and in Edmonton there was no safety issue identified whatsoever when the government pulled the plug after Shen Yun had gone to the media. Will the Culture minister admit there was no safety issue in Edmonton, as the Premier claimed, and the decision to cancel was merely out of retribution?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. This government will not be taking lessons from that political party on culture or cultural inclusion any time soon. But I will tell you that both Jubilee auditoria, in Edmonton and in Calgary, are booked 365 days a year. They negotiate their contracts, and their number one priority is the safety of employees, the safety of performers, and the safety of the audience in the Jubilee auditoria.

The Speaker: The opposition leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Culture minister: given that her own letter to the Shen Yun group, which I will

table, confirms that their decision to notify the media about this issue is the sole reason for the cancellation of their performances, will she not admit that the safety issue offered by the Premier yesterday is an excuse, is utterly false, and that the real reason she cancelled their show was simply to punish them for speaking out?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I said yesterday, I'm not going to apologize for the safety of performers at either of the Jubilees. We know that there's a contractual arrangement that was made between all performing groups, and their safety is absolutely paramount. That's why the netting is in place in Edmonton and in Calgary.

Ms Smith: They managed to figure out the safety issues in a hundred other facilities across North America.

To the Culture minister: given that yesterday she said, "My officials have offered to meet with the Shen Yun group" and given that the Shen Yun folks have said that no such offer has been made, though they would be grateful for it, will the minister correct this statement and provide a hard date when she and her office will meet with the Shen Yun group?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, next week my officials will be meeting with the Shen Yun group. I look forward to a discussion about some of the issues that they are going to bring forward. But, again, any issues revolving around safety and the net: that's not going to change.

The Speaker: Third main question. The Official Opposition leader.

Prohibited Donations to Political Parties

Ms Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again and again we've seen that the Premier's claims of changing her party and bringing transparency to Alberta are not worth the paper they are written on even when that paper is *Hansard*. In the wake of an update last Friday from the Chief Electoral Officer concerning another dozen cases of illegal donations, we asked for a change so that there would be better transparency about this disturbing issue. Not only did this government pass a law in 2010 putting a gag order on the Chief Electoral Officer, but when asked about it yesterday, they tried to cover it up in this House by claiming that he wanted to be silenced. To the Premier. As the minister who presented this bill, the Premier knows that the claims by her ministers yesterday aren't true. Will she confirm that they were wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I proudly stand by my comments yesterday. From the 2008 Chief Electoral Officer report, page 85, he recommends that these investigations be held in private.

More importantly, we shouldn't be complaining about how the elections operate. That's not really up to us to decide. This is an independent officer who reports to this Chamber, not any one of the parties.

The Speaker: The hon. opposition leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy here of this relevant page that the hon. member mentioned, the relevant page

of Mr. Gibson's report, which I'm happy to table. It requests only that legislation "add specific direction that an investigation . . . be conducted in private." It seems very clearly limited to confidentiality during an investigation, not confidentiality of the results. Will the Premier revisit the legislation she passed in 2010, lift the gag order, and allow the Chief Electoral Officer to publicize the results of these investigations?

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I say again to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that it's not up to us to be debating how elections are run. This is an independent body who reports to this Chamber, not to any particular Premier.

I also have a letter, that I will table later today, which I have sent to the Chief Electoral Officer asking him for any further recommendations, which we'll be happy to consider.

Ms Smith: Again to the Premier. Given that the legislation that the Premier wrote in 2010 not only gags Elections Alberta but includes also a provision that nobody has to pay any money back that was illegally donated prior to April 2010 and given that the Chief Electoral Officer said that he has proven 10 cases of illegal donations before 2010, most, if not all, to the PC Party, will the Premier commit to returning every single dollar of illegal donations?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what this member is forgetting is that the Election Act of Alberta has been debated with full participation of all parties in this Chamber and passed in this Chamber. If the current Chief Electoral Officer has any concerns relevant to the legislation or to the process of elections or to his ability to investigate or not investigate, he has the free will to communicate with the Minister of Justice, provide us with recommendations, and they will be duly considered by this Chamber. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'd just remind hon. members that one person speaks at a time in this Assembly. That has been a long-standing tradition. Let's try to observe it.

The hon. Liberal opposition leader.

Hardisty Care Centre Labour Dispute

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. LPNs and health care aides, the backbone of our health system, are on strike at Hardisty Care Centre. At issue is the fact that they're paid 30 per cent below industry standard. The mediator and dispute inquiry board recommended wage parity, yet Park Place Seniors Living, Hardisty's B.C.-based corporate parent, refuses to remedy this dispute. To the Minister of Health: why is there one set of standards for workers in AHS-run facilities and completely different rules and compensation standards for workers in for-profit, private facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government does not regulate the dollars that are paid to particular health care professionals. That is a matter for negotiation where agreements exist between employers and employees. In this particular case, as was said yesterday in the House, these parties are currently at odds. We have every hope that the parties will resume negotiations as quickly as possible and come to an agreement that satisfies both sides.

The Speaker: The hon. Liberal leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It causes me due concern that taxpayer-funded dollars aren't being watched closely.

Given that for-profit seniors' care facilities seek above all to maximize profits and that that invariably results in poor staff treatment, which is directly linked to poor patient care, and there's a potential for more of these labour disputes in other facilities, will the Minister of Health finally stop wasting taxpayer dollars, put an end to this government's failed experiment with the privatization of seniors' care, and bring in first contract legislation?

2:00

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member persists in trying to draw an ideological link between the events at the Hardisty nursing home and the continuing care plan in place for this province. What we in fact find are two things: the health care that is provided in the facility, and the vehicle for that is a contract with Alberta Health Services and the operator. We also have in place standards, for which we fund a rigid and rigorous compliance process for both accommodation and health care delivered in those facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Liberal leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't know that facts became ideological all of a sudden.

To the minister: how can you possibly be unaware that study after study, including the Health Quality Council and Parkland Institute reviews, clearly show that seniors in for-profit, private facilities spend more time in bed, are bathed less often, are fed less, have more falls, have more bed ulcers, and eventually end up in acute care more often all because these companies don't hire enough workers and overwork and underpay the ones that they do have?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government does not subscribe to the logic that is inherent in the hon. member's question. The quality of continuing care in this province is governed by standards, which I described in this House at length yesterday. It is supported by equal funding that is provided whether the operator is public, private, or not-for-profit. The majority of the time I can say – and I think many members of this House would agree – that the care is of excellent, excellent quality.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the NDP.

Private Operation of Health Care Facilities

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week's throne speech claimed that the government would keep public services public, yet this month a private health care facility, the Copeman clinic, is opening its doors here in Edmonton. This clinic will provide preferential access to publicly insured health services in exchange for a fee. My question is to the Premier. Why, despite the assurances in the throne speech, is she allowing privatization of public health care?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, no information has been brought to my attention that the particular clinic to which the hon. member refers is in any way in violation of the Canada Health Act or any other statute or regulation under Alberta law. If the member has such information and cares to forward it to me, I'd be pleased to look into it. As many hon. members will know, these clinics exist in many provinces across the country. They provide services that are

outside of the public health care system, and the arrangements for such are a matter between the individual patients and the clinics that serve them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. NDP leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, some provinces have put a stop to it.

Given that Albertans who can afford over \$8,000 in annual fees can queue-jump in order to get cardiac care, pediatric care, and stroke and brain injury rehabilitation, how can this Health minister pretend that his government is not complicit in the privatization of our system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member's question poses some serious allegations. I think I need not remind him that a public inquiry with respect to preferential access, or queue-jumping as he calls it, is now under way in this province and is led by a retired justice. So I would invite him to present that information to the inquiry.

With respect to the question of physician practice, as the hon. member knows, all physicians in Alberta are, in fact, by definition private providers. They bill a publicly funded health insurance system that is supported by other legislation and regulation. The clinics to which he refers are no different.

The Speaker: The hon. NDP leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's clear that the government's throne speech isn't worth the paper it's printed on. Given that the government merely has to allow private investors to fill the gaps created by the government's health care failures for private health care to grow and flourish, will the Health minister admit that his government's wilful neglect is the primary cause of the creeping privatization of our health care system?

Mr. Horne: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're presented with a question that's founded on an ideological argument. What this government is interested in is providing better access to everyday health care services for Albertans. We have talked about many strategies in the areas of primary health care, continuing care, and mental health that we're actively engaged in. Investing Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars to improve that access in the community will continue to be our focus.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Prohibited Donations to Political Parties (continued)

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday both the Justice minister and the Deputy Premier refused to do the ethical thing and reveal how much money the governing PC Party received in illegal donations. They wrongly blamed the former Chief Electoral Officer when, in fact, he only recommended that the investigation itself be conducted in private. So when the PC Party has been found guilty of accepting or soliciting illegal donations, that need not be kept secret from all Albertans. To the Minister of Justice:

will this government finally commit to changing this misguided legislation in the name of open and transparent government?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, the legislation is based on the independent report of the Chief Electoral Officer, who independently reports to this House. I've sent a letter to the new Chief Electoral Officer. If the Chief Electoral Officer has an amendment request, we will go and look at it. But it's not up to any one member to make amendment requests to the actual act. It's about a nonpartisan and independent office, and that is what the Chief Electoral Officer does, not this House.

Mr. Saskiw: We'll be tabling the report later, so you can actually read it.

To the Minister of Justice: given that the Chief Electoral Officer made it clear that it is the government's job to handle issues of transparency and accountability and given that this government fired the last Chief Electoral Officer, who tried to bring this government's ethical failings to light, will this government stop making excuses and finally reveal how much money the PC Party received in illegal donations?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will ask the hon. minister to comment soon, but we're treading into an area here of a question with respect to jurisdiction. Typically party matters are not raised in the Assembly, and I would just caution all members.

We'll allow the Minister of Justice to comment on this last question if he wishes.

Prohibited Donations to Political Parties (continued)

Mr. Denis: One thing I'll just mention again, Mr. Speaker. This Premier believes so strongly in transparency and accountability. Right behind me is an associate minister in this respect.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, the PC Party has already admitted that they've accepted several thousand dollars of illegal donations. We just want to find the full amount. Given that this government refuses to take steps to be more open, transparent, and accountable, how can we expect this government to make any serious improvements on their obvious ethical shortcomings?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, speaking of shortcomings, there are some serious factual shortcomings. First of all, the past Chief Electoral Officer was not fired. His contract simply ran its course. A search by an all-party committee took place to appoint the new, current Chief Electoral Officer. This Chief Electoral Officer has the full ability of addressing this Assembly and asking for changes to the act if he so wishes.

Lastly, it is my understanding that any and all parties that would have received money that was not received in accordance with the rules would have returned it.

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

Municipal Charters

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year Albertans have heard a lot of discussion regarding the need for special charters to be created for Alberta's two biggest cities,

Edmonton and Calgary. So far there appears to be very little progress or anything tangible officially reported about these charters. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. When will these charters be created, and what will they mean specifically for the residents of Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I've met with Mayor Nenshi and Mayor Mandel several times. In fact, I met with Mayor Mandel again just this morning, and this was an issue that we discussed. I can assure the hon. member that we're working very diligently on completing the memorandum of understanding so we can go forward with creating a city charter.

What it will mean to the citizens of Edmonton and Calgary, which is 80 per cent of the population of this province, Mr. Speaker, is essentially cost-effective, efficient service delivery on the things that they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. With respect to your response it sounds like Edmonton and Calgary will get special treatment compared to all other municipalities across the province. Are Alberta's two largest cities through the establishment of special charters getting a leg-up over other municipalities in our province?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, this is a very valid question. A lot of people in rural Alberta, especially municipal councillors in rural Alberta, have asked that. I can assure the hon. member that we're also reviewing the Municipal Government Act. This is not to single out any municipality in particular to provide extra services but to make sure that our relationship with every single municipality in this province is robust and that we deliver the services every single community needs. We're going to continue to work on that.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I appreciate the general information; it's very helpful. In general Albertans need to know whether these charters mean that taxpayers living in Edmonton and Calgary will end up paying more taxes. Will this be the case?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, after my meeting with Mayor Mandel this morning that was one of the first questions that was asked by the media when we came out. I can assure everyone in this House and every Albertan that Mayor Mandel and I agreed first and foremost that there is only one taxpayer in this province. This is about roles and responsibilities first and then discussing revenue. We will not discuss revenue without first and foremost keeping in mind that there is only one taxpayer and they're taxed a lot. This is about streamlining service delivery, ultimately.

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

Northern Gateway Pipeline Project

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northern Gateway pipeline is critical to the growth of the energy sector and jobs both in Alberta and Canada. In fact, last Friday Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver said that Canada is taking an \$18 billion to \$19 billion hit every year by not having this access to Asia Pacific

markets. Yet this Premier has failed so far to persuade B.C. Premier Christy Clark, a friend of Alberta, to support this important pipeline project. If the Premier cannot even get Alberta's friends to back Gateway, how does she expect to get the support of the world?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, yet again incorrect. As a matter of fact, Premier Clark as recently as today, I believe, has sent a message via media supporting both Premier Wall and Premier Redford in their deliberations today relevant to the development of energy, acknowledging the fact that it is the provinces that are leaders in developing energy in our mutual jurisdictions and that we need to take an actual leadership. There is a great deal of agreement between the three western Premiers on the responsible development and transmission of our natural resources.

The Speaker: Thank you. Just a cautionary reminder that we do not use proper names in this Assembly.

Let us go on to the hon. member's second question.

Mr. Hale: Lots of words and no action. The Premier continues to tout the Canadian energy strategy, which, after eight months of talking, includes siding with Chiquita against us and no details. Since Premier Clark is not here for today's western Premiers' meeting, will Premier Redford commit to going to B.C. to secure her public support for Gateway?

The Speaker: Again, just a cautionary reminder, which I'm sure you will be reminded of, to not refer to the presence or absence of members.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me quote Premier Clark of British Columbia from as early as today saying: I support a national energy strategy. She goes on to say, referring to Edmonton: if I was there, that would be the comment that I would offer; I know that the Premier of Alberta and Brad Wall already know my thoughts on this issue, that I have communicated earlier, and I am seeing what they will come up with at the meeting.

She is very supportive of this meeting. She wishes she could be over here. Obviously, for political reasons she has to be in British Columbia right now, but to suggest that Premier Brad Wall, the Premier of this province, and Premier Clark are not united on developing a national energy strategy would be incorrect.

Mr. Hale: When will this Premier make it her top priority to stand up for Albertans and secure the firm support of the B.C. Premier for the Gateway pipeline project so that western Premiers present a strong western front?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, not only has this Premier stood up for Albertans, but on April 23 most Albertans stood up for this Premier. Again, she will be delivering on what Albertans have wanted us to deliver on.

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

Child and Youth in Care

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Human Services. I understand that the role of the Child and Youth Advocate is to investigate serious incidents involving youth in care and making recommendations for improving services for vulnerable children and youth in our province. To the minister: how will the Child and Youth Advocate improve transparency in child intervention systems and ensure

better outcomes for children in provincial government care? Remember, sir, that this is about kids and not process.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the fact that one of the first actions that our Premier took upon being elected as leader last fall and being installed as Premier was to ask me to bring forward legislation which would make the Child and Youth Advocate's office independent. That was done, and I'm very pleased and proud that that office is now an independent officer of the Legislature, effective April 1 of this year. I obviously cannot speak on behalf of the Child and Youth Advocate's office because it's independent, but we will be working closely to ensure that all appropriate cases are referred to that office and also to ensure that that office through the Legislative Offices Committee has the budget it needs to appropriately investigate, report on, and publicly bring to the attention of this Legislature all issues relevant to children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Aboriginal children represent 60 per cent of children in care, a number that is way too high. Will the Child and Youth Advocate ensure that the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in care is addressed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I cannot ensure that the Child and Youth Advocate's office does anything. They're an independent office of the Legislature as of April 1, and they will set their own agenda as to what issues they deal with.

I can confirm that the issue with respect to the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in the child welfare system as it is across this province is an extremely important issue to us. In fact, prior to the election we had a task force, which I believe you led, which helped us to talk with First Nations and aboriginal people across the province and bring some more focus to that agenda. We're going to continue with our ADM in that area, Catherine Twinn, to ensure that we put the time and attention necessary to deal with that issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: how can we be sure that the ministry is making real changes and improvements to the child intervention system based on recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate and Council for Quality Assurance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is extremely important because the children of Alberta deserve the representation that they're going to get from the Child and Youth Advocate on an independent basis, the assurance that those recommendations will be publicly available and will be unfettered, and that we will actually have the opportunity in this House to receive that report and to talk about the action taken with respect to that report. Two very important pieces: the Child and Youth Advocate's office being an independent office of the Legislature and the establishment of the Council for Quality Assurance to make sure that every incident is investigated and that we learn from them so that we can continue to improve.

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

Family Care Clinics

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past eight years primary care networks have been proven to greatly improve access, quality, and cost-effectiveness of health care services to 80 per cent of families across Alberta, yet without consulting and without an overarching plan to integrate these into the health care system, the Premier announced recently 140 new family care clinics. To the minister: why did the Premier commit to billions of new dollars for family care clinics without evidence or a full consultation with the relevant stakeholders?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, primary care networks have been a tremendous catalyst in improving access to primary health care across Alberta. The intention of the Premier and the commitment of this government is to increase access to primary health care through building on the success of primary care networks and introducing additional family care clinics across the province. We can't do enough at this point in time to increase access to primary care for Albertans who need it. We have about 20 per cent of Albertans who report they do not have access to a family doctor. As the census data which was reported on today shows, we are both coping with an aging population and, increasingly, many new families. Our birth rate is increasing in Alberta. Primary care is our top priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier promised to evaluate the first three family care clinics before expanding. Why did you proceed, without doing the evaluation, to 140 new family care clinics?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, neither the Premier nor this minister made any such commitment. We intend for family care clinics not to be a uniform model to be applied in a cookie-cutter fashion across the province but to address the needs of specific communities. Our commitment from the very beginning was to work not only with all health professions in designing family care clinics but to work with local communities to identify the areas where they need the services the most and to do our best to put a model in place which serves that community.

Dr. Swann: Did you not also commit to following the 21 recommendations of the Health Quality Council report, which was to not introduce any major changes in the health care system without proper consultation, without evidence, without moving forward on the health care budget?

2:20

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what we committed to was something that Albertans have been asking for for some time, and that is increased access to team-based primary care in or near their home community. The family care clinics and the primary care networks are important models of care delivery. What really matters, of course, and what this government will be talking about increasingly in the next few months are what core services Albertans want available to them in or near their home community on a standard set of hours, delivered by a team of professionals that can respond to the needs not only of young children but of aging parents.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Twinning of Highway 63

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 63 is the primary transportation route used to haul heavy equipment, oversized loads, and massive machinery while at the same time serving as the primary transportation route for lower Athabasca community members. Given that highway 63 has been the site of 80 fatalities in the last six years alone, to the Minister of Transportation: why won't the minister admit the government has failed to make the twinning of highway 63 the priority Albertans expect it to be?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I would have hoped that the member asking the question would have been listening better yesterday. Had he been listening yesterday, he would have heard that this government has already invested a billion dollars in and around Fort McMurray. He would have heard that we have \$450 million over the next three years to twin the southern hundred kilometres of that highway. He would have also heard that this government is committed to twinning the rest of the highway and, in between now and when that's done, to bringing forward initiatives to make it more safe, more operable for the people using it, and better for Albertans. It's happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that six years have passed since the province promised to twin highway 63 and considering only 33 kilometres have been completed to date, this government has been dragging its feet. At this rate the twinning won't be complete until 2034. That's not good enough for the thousands of Albertans trying to get to and from Fort McMurray safely every day. Why won't the government commit to a firm timeline for completion of the twinning of highway 63?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it a little slower this time for the member. Over the next three years there's \$450 million in the budget, which will twin the southern hundred kilometres. We've committed to twinning the entire thing. Between now and then we're working with the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to bring forward interim measures. All of this is happening. The government has committed. The government has committed a lot of money. The government has committed resources. It's a high priority. It's happening. The hon. member should just perhaps pay attention to what's already been said, and he could deal with new questions requiring new information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has appointed a special adviser to come up with another plan and given that the government's plan is to talk about another plan for highway 63 when what Albertans want to see is action, to the Minister of Transportation: doesn't the minister understand that you can't pave a road with empty promises?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member, again, was paying attention, he would have seen, really, nothing but action. He would have seen a billion dollars spent in the past. He would see \$450 million more coming up in the future. He would actually have seen action since the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo increased signage to tell people when the passing lanes are, to encourage them to be patient and wait. He would have seen

increased enforcement. It's all happening, and Albertans, from what I hear, are very happy with the progress made although they would like it to be faster.

Family Care Clinics (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Immediately prior to the election this Premier announced three government-controlled health clinics as pilot projects, as was discussed. Although family doctors expressed concern that these clinics might undercut proven primary care networks, which are run independently by doctors and other health professionals, many were willing to give these pilot projects a chance. Then during the election the Premier, without any consultation, promised to build 140 of these government clinics, shocking the Alberta Medical Association and doctors across this province. To the Health minister: why would your government undertake such a massive reform without first consulting family doctors and the AMA or Albertans, for that matter, which they didn't?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member raises the three family care clinics that are already up and running. They are a source of great pride to Albertans, and they're doing an awful lot to help access to primary care in the communities they serve. In northeast Edmonton, for example, the primary care clinic is serving a large number of new Albertans, new Canadians, many of whom do not speak English. It is serving a large unattached population in that part of the city, where there is a great need for mental health and addiction services. In many other respects they are doing exactly what we intended family care clinics to do; that is, to provide basic primary care services to people in the communities where they live, with their involvement and with consultation.

Mr. Anderson: Given the concerns expressed by family doctors that these government-run health clinics are meant to replace existing family clinics and primary care networks and given that one of the pilot project clinics resulted in the Calgary Mosaic primary care network shutting down, according to its own executive director, is it this minister's goal to replace existing family practices and primary care networks with these new state-run health clinics, or is it to staff these new clinics with new nurses and doctors, or was this just a brazen electioneering promise made without consultation and without a plan? Door number C perhaps? No?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I don't know which of the multiple questions there the hon. member intends me to answer. What I will tell you is that if the hon. member and his colleagues are suggesting that we have an oversupply of primary health care in this province, I think they should go out and consult with Albertans themselves. There is more than enough to be done, more than enough opportunities for family doctors and all professions, who should be able to practise to their full scope of training and expertise to deliver these critical and foundational health services to people in their own communities. That's what we ran on, that's what we're committed to do, and that's what you'll see from us in the months to come.

Mr. Anderson: The doctors didn't see it coming. They don't want them. Listen to the doctors for once.

If your intent is not to replace existing family practices or primary care networks, then let's talk about cost. Given that I cannot find any costing of your promise to build and operate 140

new government health clinics over the next three years, will you please either tell us or table for the House both the estimated cost to build or lease these clinics as well as the annual cost to employ the health professionals needed to run them properly, or will you refuse this request and just keep making it up as you go along?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, my job is to think about and lead initiatives to improve health care in Alberta. If the hon. member wants to preoccupy himself with questions of infrastructure, that's entirely up to him. We have over 40 primary care networks in this province that are doing a very good job. Their work is supported by Albertans, other health professionals, and physicians. We have three new family care clinics, with more to come, that are also very well supported by family physicians and other health care leaders across Alberta. As I said earlier, we will start with a question of what core services we want to make available to all citizens in or near their home community. The questions around how models are structured in order to deliver that will be answered in the fullness of time for this member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet another recent study was critical of the Alberta government on transparency, this one putting us at last. My question to the Minister of Service Alberta: why is the government using the current FOIP legislation to hide information from our citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the member for asking his first question in the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, our government and our Premier have an unprecedented commitment to transparency and accountability. For the first time we have a Premier that dedicated an associate minister solely responsible on this file. Let me say that Alberta is a leader. Alberta leads Canada with completing over 90 per cent of FOIP requests within 30 days. On the other side, we proactively publish some of the most important information like ministerial office expenses and payments made to all vendors that deal with the government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear the government's quick response on FOIP, but the FOIP application process is a deterrent in itself. What are you doing about this?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The information and data that government has really belongs to its citizens, so we're finding more and more ways where we can really bypass the FOIP process altogether, use that as a last resort, and provide proactively more information and more data to Albertans. It's their information. They deserve to have it, and we're working on this.

Mr. Quadri: Mr. Speaker, people also want transparency on their personal information. How is this government making sure that Albertans can access their own personal information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have a right to the personal information government has collected about them. That's why there's no application fee when Albertans are requesting this information. But Albertans also want their personal information protected. The way we do that is, first of all, to ensure that we only collect information that's absolutely necessary. Let me say that we are North American leaders by being one of the only jurisdictions that has private-sector privacy protection. That means that when a private-sector actor breaches a privacy policy, they have a mandatory notification requirement, where they notify the commissioner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

School Construction and Renovation

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The government announced during the election campaign an ambitious plan to build 50 new schools and renovate 70 others. In making that announcement, a lot of people were perplexed to find that those school projects, so desperately needed, would be tied to surplus revenue, yet at the same time corporate handouts like the \$3 billion AOSTRA project were put into place. To the Education minister: wouldn't it make more sense to flip those around and put the kids first, commit the money to renovating and building new schools and maybe put the money to the other industry contingent on surplus?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I think one thing we know for a fact is that our province is growing at an unprecedented rate. There are many communities throughout this province that simply require more schools, and that is our number one priority. This Premier and the Minister of Education along with the Minister of Infrastructure have made a commitment that we will provide the schools that the children need so that they can continue receiving the 21st century education that they are receiving in this province in buildings that are adequate for delivering that education. That is a commitment that we have made to our children in this province, and we'll keep that commitment.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, given that many are beginning to wonder if the government's hesitation in commitment to building and renovating schools like they promised is because they don't have the money for it and given that it's well documented that many schools, as we know, are in disrepair and that many communities are growing so quickly that their schools are bursting at the seams, do we have a plan to commit the money now so we can put the kids first? How are we going to operate these schools when we do commit that money? Do we have money for that also?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, this is quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. Here is a member from a political party that is advocating cutting budgets, that is advocating building less, that is advocating cutting programs, and that has run an entire campaign on that, but at the same time he's questioning whether we have the money to build the schools that are so desperately required. I can tell the speaker one thing. There was a budget in this House, that was debated and passed. That budget was taken to Albertans. They reviewed it, and they voted overwhelmingly in favour of the budget and this government, and we will deliver on our commitments.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister is right about one thing. We did advocate certain cuts to a bloated bureaucracy, but we said that we'd like to see more money put forward to the front lines. I think we all agreed on that.

To this minister: given the government promised Albertans during the election campaign it was going to take care of these desperately needed new schools, both new and renovated, and given the government has often based its decisions on where to build new schools on politics rather than need, as we know, will you publish a list for all Albertans to see detailing which communities are going to get new schools, which communities are going to get their schools renovated when and if funds magically appear to this government to spend on the students that desperately need it in this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: To address the first part of the comment, 85 per cent of Alberta public servants are front-line servants. I would want this member to stand up and tell us which ones he wants to fire, those who deliver nursing care or those who teach or do other important work for Albertans.

One thing, Mr. Speaker. If he wants to see the list, every school board provides the Minister of Infrastructure every June, July with their capital plan. That capital plan is reviewed, and priorities are being addressed. This member is a new member – I appreciate that – but he will soon know that those capital plans are available. He can review them. They're at his disposal. Go at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw. [interjections] There was some heckling and clapping going on, and perhaps you didn't hear. I've recognized the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Alberta Office in Ottawa

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Speech from the Throne we learned that this government intends to open an office in our nation's capital. To the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: are we not adequately served through the representation of government Members of Parliament, with which we are well supplied?

Mr. Dallas: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Conservative MPs bring an Alberta perspective to discussions on items of federal jurisdiction, but we need to remember that we have two orders of government, and Albertans have elected this government to provide representation on their views that are inside provincial responsibility. We seek to have, as an observer would put it, boots on the ground in Ottawa to deliver our messages and report back to us when something more can be done or said with respect to our government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is again to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What other purpose does it serve to have an official Alberta presence in Ottawa?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has worked hard to maintain good relations with Ottawa. However, we can increase our impact with a consistent presence and face-to-face meeting opportunities with key players in Ottawa. With an official representative available, we can reach out personally to make policy presentations to decision-makers and advisers who might

otherwise be out of reach to our ministers, and we can further strengthen these relationships.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do we anticipate a patronage position to fill this office?

Mr. Dallas: No, Mr. Speaker. The selection of an official representative will follow a national search by an executive search recruitment firm.

Risk Assessments for PDD Clients

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, on May 12, tragically, a front-line worker, Dianne McClements, died in Camrose, allegedly killed by an individual with special needs who was in her care, on the heels of Valerie Wolski's death a mere 15 months earlier. The families of the victims deserve answers from this government. Our front-line workers need to know they will be safe while caring for our most vulnerable citizens. The Wildrose would immediately publish the recommendations of the occupational health and safety investigation into Valerie Wolski's death to ensure the safety of our front-line staff. To the Minister of Human Services: why has this government failed to produce this report, and when can we expect the results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the recommendations of the occupational health and safety division have been posted. They've been posted in the form of orders to PDD and to the operating authority in the Wolski situation, and those are known publicly.

With respect to the investigative report, that has been provided to the prosecutors' office, and it would be inappropriate to publish that report until prosecutors have made a decision with respect to charges.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the initial occupational health and safety investigation reportedly recommended not-for-profit agencies be provided with risk assessments for their clients, will this government make risk assessments available immediately to protect our front-line workers while waiting to release this report?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've inquired and been informed that now, with PDD being part of the Human Services portfolio, all of the recommendations that were made by occupational health and safety have been implemented by PDD, not just in the central region but right across the province. I am assured that that is happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This smells like the same kind of distasteful deflection we saw from this government after the death of Ms Wolski last year. How can the minister tell Alberta's front-line workers it cares about them when it will not be open and transparent when tragedies happen?

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. member is referring to. We've been totally open and transparent with respect to the posting of the occupational health and safety orders. We've been totally open about the fact that there's an investigation happening, and that investigation has now been turned over to the

prosecutors' office to determine whether there are charges to be laid. I've been open in saying that the PDD authority has assured me as minister that the recommendations, the orders that were put in place, have been carried out not only in the central Alberta jurisdiction but right across the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today, but before we go on to the next part of the program, I wonder if I could ask House leaders to please review the issue of preambles to questions with their members at their respective caucuses for tomorrow. Today we only got to 96 questions and answers, which is well below what we're used to in this House.

Secondly, please also review the references to any absence or presence of members.

Thirdly, of course, as we all know, elected officials should not be referred to by their proper names in this Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, a private member's statement.

Regulatory Reform

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to talk about overregulation in our province. It's ubiquitous, and I'll provide two examples as diverse as food preparation and truck transportation.

Last year Stirling's Settler Days chili cook-off was apparently declared a threat to public health, and it wasn't because it was too spicy. It was because the chili was potluck, prepared in the homes of private citizens, as has been done for as long as I can remember. The organizing committee was told that in future the chili would have to be made in approved, inspected kitchens or on-site. Since when did open-air cooking become safer and more sanitary than private homes?

A trucking company owner told me of an ongoing challenge that he faces with regulations in his industry. Several times a week his trucks haul crushed cars from Lethbridge over the weigh scales at Coutts on their way to a steel mill in the U.S.A. For the past year he's been using three-eighths inch cables to secure the cars. Every load has crossed the scales and has been delivered without incident or accident. Last week a load was stopped, and the driver was issued a fine of \$570. The reason? The scale operators decided the cables weren't safe and that he'd have to use chains.

Couldn't these government employees, whose salary comes from taxes paid by this trucker and others, have seen themselves as a resource to him? Shouldn't they have given him a call and let him know of this unexpected change in their attitude or enforcement approach so that the fine could have been avoided? Better yet, why weren't he and other haulers consulted about whatever government concerns had arisen in an attempt to find a mutually acceptable solution? Want to know the answer? Because they don't have to.

Wildrose believes in more freedom through less government regulations. So do most Albertans.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Saskiw: Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) earlier today I provided written notice to your office of my intention to raise a matter of privilege, which I hope I'll have the opportunity to present later today. I have the requisite copies of that written notice.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a letter from myself to the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Brian Fjeldheim, which I had cause to send over to his office. Five copies will be provided to the Clerk.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter actually addressed to the Premier but from a representative of the Alberta Grandparents Association. It's signed by Marilyn Marks, and she wishes to make the point again that the recent evaluation of Alberta's Family Law Act by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, coming out of the U of C, has found that our Family Law Act makes it virtually impossible for grandparents to meet the test that is required of them in the act in order to be able to access their grandchildren. She notes that grandparents and other family members require legislation that is less adversarial and that is not set out or made in a court which challenges family concerns.

Thank you.

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate amount of documents, a letter from the Culture minister to Mr. Jeffrey Yang, director of the Falun Dafa Association of Calgary.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of page 85, the Chief Electoral Officer Duties and Powers, indicating that the investigation only shall be conducted in private, not the results of said investigation.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised a purported question of privilege regarding a media briefing that took place prior to the introduction of Bill 1 on Thursday, May 24. I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly for consideration. I have given it considerable consideration over the last 24 hours, and I'm prepared to make a ruling in this regard.

For many members this will be their first opportunity to observe a question of privilege being raised and to hear the chair's subsequent ruling in that regard. Standing Order 15, which guides this Assembly, sets out the procedure to be followed when a question of privilege is raised. Hon. members will note that the chair's role in making a ruling on a purported question of privilege is solely to determine whether the question raised is a prima facie, in the first instance in other words, breach of privilege. It is a threshold test. If it is found to be a prima facie question of privilege, it is appropriate for a member to give notice of a motion such as one referring the matter to a committee for disposition.

Technically the matter raised by the member is a question of contempt although it is treated in the same way as a question of privilege might be. The authors of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, note the following passage at page 82.

It is important to distinguish between a "breach of privilege" and "contempt of Parliament". Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House. There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members, or its officers.

Dealing first with the procedural requirement, as the chair noted yesterday, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona did meet the requirement in Standing Order 15(2) of providing a minimum of two hours' notice prior to the commencement of the sitting. Notice of the question of privilege was received in the Speaker's office yesterday at 10:57 a.m.

In making representations in the Assembly during yesterday's proceedings, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona referred to a press conference held by the Premier and the Government House Leader at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 24, in which both the Speech from the Throne and Bill 1, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012, were discussed. The member was advised by her staff that when they had attempted to attend the conference, opposition staff were specifically denied access.

2:50

The basis of the purported question of privilege is that the member's ability to discharge her parliamentary duties was impeded when information about a government bill was provided to the media prior to the bill's introduction in this Assembly. In response the hon. Government House Leader noted that during the press conference Bill 1 was discussed but only in general terms and that no specific wording was provided to those in attendance. The Government House Leader acknowledged the importance of ensuring that members are the first to see proposed legislation in its final form before a bill is disclosed to outside parties.

On March 5, 2003, Speaker Kowalski ruled that there was a prima facie case of contempt in circumstances where information on the contents of a bill on notice in the Order Paper were provided in a media briefing prior to the bill's introduction in the Assembly. The Speaker held at page 304 of *Hansard* for that day that "the department briefing provided to the media concerning [the bill] when the bill was on notice but before it was introduced constitutes a prima facie case of privilege as it offends the dignity and the authority of this Assembly."

By convention no notice is required for the introduction of Bill 1, which is the first bill of a session and is introduced as a part of opening day ceremonies to assert the Assembly's independence from the Crown. However, the chair is of the view that this has no bearing on the particular matter. At the time the relevant press conference took place, Bill 1 most certainly would have been in final form and ready for introduction, I would expect.

The chair would like to make all members aware of a recent ruling from the Canadian House of Commons concerning the early release of details contained in government estimates. In his March 22, 2011, ruling Speaker Milliken stated the following at page 9113 in the *House of Commons Debates* for that day.

The member . . . is certainly not misguided in his expectation that members of the House, individually and collectively, must

receive from the government particular types of information required for the fulfillment of their parliamentary duties before it is shared elsewhere. However, in such instances when there is a transgression of this well-established practice, the Chair must ascertain whether, as a result, the member was impeded in the performance of parliamentary duties.

While in the matter before us there may be a legitimate grievance, as admitted even by the President of the Treasury Board, there has been no specific evidence to suggest that any member was [actually] impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties, and thus there can be no finding of prima facie privilege. Further, the minister has recognized the seriousness of this matter and given his assurance that measures will be in place to prevent a recurrence.

An earlier ruling by the same Speaker is also on point. On November 5, 2009, Speaker Milliken concluded that the Minister of Public Safety in a press conference had not disclosed the details of a bill yet to be introduced and had only discussed in broad terms the policy initiative proposed in the bill. On this basis, the Speaker found that there was no prima facie question of privilege.

In conclusion and on a matter related to the purported point of privilege, the chair acknowledges and appreciates the Government House Leader's apology for the apparent inability of opposition staff to gain access to the aforementioned press conference of May 24, 2012. The chair also notes the Government House Leader's submission that the bill was neither circulated, nor was the specific content of the bill disclosed.

Given the circumstances of this particular case the chair finds that the member's ability to perform her functions has not been impeded, and accordingly the chair is unable to find a prima facie case of contempt and considers this matter now closed.

The chair does want to thank members for their attention to this matter.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on a point of privilege.

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising according to Standing Order 15(2) to raise a point of privilege, that on May 28, 2012, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General interfered with the abilities of members of this Assembly to fulfill their duties when he misled the Assembly in response to a question in Oral Question Period. Page 83 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states that "deliberately attempting to mislead the House" is considered contempt of the House.

I'd like to start with a preliminary matter. Points of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity. Notice concerning this point of privilege was sent to your office, Mr. Speaker, this morning as well as to all House leaders. As such, it is our view that the point of privilege was raised in a timely manner and is in order.

I would like to now address the substantive elements of the point of privilege; namely, the first element, that the Assembly was misled. In particular, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General stated that the legislation regarding investigations by the Chief Electoral Officer was changed based on the officer's recommendations. In his words, he called this a fact. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, in review of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer, Lorne Gibson, he stated in his October 2006 report under recommendation 26(d) that the government "add specific direction that an investigation shall be conducted in private." This report was tabled by the Leader of the

Official Opposition earlier today. Note that the wording is that the investigation be conducted in private. However, nowhere in the recommendation does it state that if someone or a provincial party has been found guilty, those results can't be made public. Therefore, what the member said is not a fact.

How on earth in a modern democracy could the findings that a political party accepted illegal donations be kept secret and private? Once the investigation is complete, there is no reason to withhold this information from Albertans. As such, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General clearly misled the Assembly.

However, this is not enough. The *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* refers to a three-part test in order to find a prima facie case for a finding of contempt that a member deliberately misled the House. First, it must prove that the statement was misleading. Here the document of the Chief Electoral Officer speaks for itself. The member misled this Assembly in stating that the government changed the law because of the Chief Electoral Officer's report. That is not correct. The report clearly states that it is the investigations that are to be kept private, not the results of those investigations.

Second, it must be established that the member knew at the time that the misleading statement was incorrect.

The third and, I would submit, most difficult part of the test is that the member, in making the statement, intended to mislead the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to determine the mens rea of an individual, what they knew at a particular time. However, the facts here would indicate that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General referred to that report, and presumably by referring to the report, the learned member would've read the report. However, to give the benefit of the doubt, the member opposite could simply have been mistaken or in error. If that is the case, I would ask the member to retract and correct his statement.

Pending the finding of this Speaker that there is a prima facie case of privilege, I seek to move that the matter of privilege concerning the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General's comments be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when I was a starting lawyer about 12 years ago, one of my principals said to me: when you have the facts, you pound the facts; when you have a law, you pound the law; and if you have neither, you just pound.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go through specifically what was said in the Chief Electoral Officer's report. I'm referring to a report that has already been tabled some time ago. It said specifically, "Add specific direction that an investigation shall be conducted in private."

Then I will also refer to Alberta's Election Act, section 4.2(4). I do not believe that this needs to be tabled. If I'm wrong, please correct me. It says:

Subject to subsection (5), any former Chief Electoral Officer and every person who is or was employed or engaged by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer shall maintain the confidentiality of all information and allegations that come to their knowledge in the course of an inquiry or investigation.

It doesn't just say "allegations"; it also says "all information" in and of itself.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of the Chief Electoral Officer, as I'm sure you and all members of this House are aware – this is an officer who reports directly to the Legislature. If there are any

changes, it has to go through an all-party committee. I look forward to the report from the 2012 election because there will be some recommendations there as well.

I wanted to mention, as well, just in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that this member has mentioned a three-part test. The first part of the test is that the statement was misleading. I respectfully submit to you and all members of this House that the statements I made yesterday were not misleading. I stand by them completely. Further, I also mention to you as our new Speaker that this member's three-part test, which he has quite correctly indicated, talked about intending to mislead the Assembly and talks about a mens rea, which is a mental element, not an action element. Not only has there been no misleading; he has failed to show that there has been any intent to do so.

I would lastly mention the old adage that when dealing with matters of libel, which you mentioned earlier just in your preamble, truth is an absolute defence to any such action. Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Any other comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to this quite intently, and I appreciate the point of privilege being called, but in this matter I accept the representation of the Solicitor General. The legislation as it was read to me was silent on things, whether they would go public afterwards. When the legislation is silent on that, I think it's up to the government to interpret that.

I think there's also something to remember. In this House we're playing with live ammunition. We have to answer questions, and I understand that oftentimes we're doing the best we can to answer questions on a quick basis and give answers in that regard.

In this matter I don't believe the Solicitor General in his words or his actions deliberately misled this House, and I would agree more with his interpretation of what happened yesterday than the submission put forward by the honourable presenter of the argument that was forthcoming. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have spent some time rereading the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, and I do believe in this case that the Minister of Justice is correct. However, in the reading of section 4.2(4) and (5), where it's talking about maintaining "the confidentiality of all information and allegations that come to their knowledge in the course of an inquiry or investigation," it does not specifically say that that information is never to be released. In other words, the act is silent on whether the information can ever be released to the public or to the Assembly, but it does require that the officers that are involved in the investigation keep that information confidential. In other words, they don't go out and put it on the cocktail chatter. But the act itself does not specifically prohibit a disclosure of an investigation.

I think there's a very fine line that's being drawn here. There is the following section in (5) that does say that, you know, information should be disclosed to a person whose conduct is the subject of it, that it should be disclosed to the person conducting the investigation to be able to get information from someone else, et cetera, et cetera. There are a number of categories here.

I think we have to be very careful about accepting what the Justice minister is saying today as there being a prohibition in the act against ever disclosing any results of an investigation that takes place under the Election Act or the election disclosures act because that is not the case. We have had in the Chief Electoral Officer's past reports the disclosure of various cases that he, in fact, investigated. So we need to be very careful on this one. I agree that in this particular instance the minister is correct, but it should not be taken that this is correct for all times in all cases.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'll recognize one more speaker, then. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Real quick, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and say that obviously I agree with the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, the opposition deputy House leader, on this point of privilege.

It's very clear. First, we have to look at what the recommendation says that the Chief Electoral Officer made to the Justice minister, who is now the Premier. The specific quote from the report is that he asked to "add specific direction that an investigation shall be conducted in private." Having an investigation conducted in private is very important, obviously. It's important, when you're talking about allegations and things like that floating around out there in the ether and so forth, when you've got innuendo and so forth, when everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty, that you don't allow that information to go public because it's unfair to the person whose character might be impugned in that situation. That's very clear, and that's very clearly the statement in the recommendation that's made.

For this member we're not talking about the act here. That's not what's in question in this point of privilege. What's in question is his representation of what was said in the recommendation, and he specifically said that what was said in the recommendation – nothing to do with the act, what was said in the recommendation – was that the Chief Electoral Officer said that he wanted to have complete privacy with regard to not only conducting these investigations but also to keep the results from investigations where illegal donations were found from ever being made public. It's clearly not what the recommendation says. It doesn't say it.

For this minister to stand in this House and say that the Chief Electoral Officer at that time, Mr. Lorne Gibson, asked to keep the results of findings of illegal donations to political parties private and nonpublic is completely false. That's not what the report said. This minister has clearly misled the House by saying so, and he should retract those statements. If he wants to refer to the legislation, he should refer to the legislation but not the recommendation because that's not what the recommendation said, and he knows it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Unless anyone has anything new or different to offer, we'll conclude the speaking list at that point.

Hon. members, it's a rare time when you get two purported points of privilege raised over two consecutive days. In fact, I don't know if it's ever happened in my time here, but c'est la vie.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has of course met the technical requirements, as he's indicated. In fact, he did provide written notice of his intention to raise this point of privilege, and that was provided in writing this morning at, I believe, around 11:18 or thereabouts; nonetheless, in advance of

the two-hour rule requirement. He subsequently gave oral notice. So he's done what had to be done.

The chair has now listened to some good debate on the matter, and the chair will take the evening to study the debate and to do a little further research and will comment tomorrow.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Adjournment of Spring Session

7. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2012 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the traditional adjournment motion that's introduced on one of the first few days of every session.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

4. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Evening Sittings

6. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet in the evening on Tuesday, May 29, 2012, and Wednesday, May 30, 2012, for consideration of government business unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarification, if we deal with Government Motion 11 this afternoon, we will not intend to sit in the evening on either of those two days.

The Speaker: This is Government Motion 6, hon. Government House Leader, so this motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

3:10 MLA Compensation Review

11. Mr. Hancock moved:
A. Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in principle the recommendations of the Review of Compensation of Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta,

“the report,” submitted by the Hon. J.C. Major, CC, QC, and refer the report to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, “the committee,” for implementation where possible by June 30, 2012, subject to the following exceptions:

- (a) that recommendation 4 regarding salary for the Premier not be implemented but that the committee implement a salary that reflects a differential of plus 25 per cent between the Premier's salary and that of a minister with portfolio;
- (b) that recommendation 10 concerning the expense portion of a member's remuneration, known as the tax-free allowance, not be implemented and that the amount of that expense allowance be set at zero pending an amendment to the Legislative Assembly Act to eliminate it;
- (c) that recommendation 11 regarding the implementation of a new transition allowance be rejected and that no further amounts shall be accumulated beyond those accrued by eligible members prior to the commencement of the 28th Legislature;
- (d) that the committee examine alternatives to the pension plan for members proposed in recommendation 12 and discussed in section 3.5 of the report, including defined contribution plans, and report to the Assembly with its recommendations;

- B. Be it resolved that nothing in this motion shall limit the committee's ability to report to the Assembly on any other matter arising from the report.

[Adjourned debate May 28: Mr. Horner]

The Speaker: Are there any speakers? This motion is debatable.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre?

Ms Blakeman: I will pass.

The Speaker: Does anyone from Executive Council wish to conclude debate?

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I'm trying to read the signals here. Carry on.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to debate the motion before the House to accept in principle the MLA remuneration and recommendations by Justice John C. Major. First of all, let me remind hon. members that it was Wildrose, more specifically our Finance critic, the Member for Airdrie, who really drove the issue of MLA pay, severances, and transitions during the last Legislature. He brought forth a private member's bill more than a year ago, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011, that would have dramatically reduced the often-exorbitant amount of severance MLAs collect from taxpayers upon defeat or retirement. Naturally, of course, the government members defeated this bill and soundly. Not one government MLA stood up for fiscal restraint and respect for taxpayers when the bill came to the floor for a vote.

The NDP Member for Edmonton-Strathcona voted for the bill, the Liberal Member for Calgary-Buffalo voted for the bill, and I thank them for their co-operation on behalf of the taxpayers in this province. But not a single Progressive Conservative MLA stood up to say no to these extravagant entitlements that day. I have no

doubt that without the Member for Airdrie's tireless efforts, pushing this issue to the forefront of public debate and ultimately into the recent election campaign, we wouldn't be in this Legislature today talking about changing the way MLAs are compensated. I'd like to thank him today for all of his hard work on this file on behalf of the Official Opposition caucus and indeed on behalf of all Albertans.

It's a shame that this government needed to see its political life flash before its eyes before they acted on this issue, Mr. Speaker. But as it is with just about everything this government does, it's not important enough to act on unless the voters are upset enough about it. Then, and only then, do we get any kind any kind of response from the government. Nevertheless, we are here today about to change how we as elected MLAs are compensated and to better reflect what Albertans expect from us in terms of fairness, transparency, and respect for hard-earned tax dollars. I am happy about that, and I dare say it's about time.

I don't know if anyone will forget the very first act of this last government, of which the current Premier was a senior member. Weeks after Albertans cast their ballots, the cabinet went behind closed doors and helped themselves to a staggering 34 per cent pay hike. No warning, no consultation, and no apologies, just a brazen cash grab from the politicians just elected to serve Albertans and protect their tax dollars. It was a stunning display of arrogance, Mr. Speaker, and it came to define the Progressive Conservative government as out of touch and only out for themselves, and perhaps it sent us down the path to where we are today, here debating Justice John Major's report. Until then, no one single instance more clearly defined the compensation issue in the minds of Albertans than the cabinet pay hike of 2008.

But as I said before, Mr. Speaker, this government didn't act right away. It's not as if the public backlash wasn't strong enough to warrant corrective action. In my three years touring Alberta prior to being elected, no one issue elicited more anger from everyday Albertans than the cabinet pay hike. Instead of saying, "Whoa, maybe we overstepped here," and "Let's look at reforming our pay structure," the government doubled down. Sure, there was a patronizing offer to return a tiny portion of the huge pay raise they gave themselves, but in my estimation that cynical gesture only made Albertans angrier. The public thought: "These guys can line their pockets with my tax dollars, give back a few pennies, and expect me to forgive them? Not a chance."

From there, Mr. Speaker, this government was thoroughly and rightly criticized for hanging on to these giant pay hikes while at the same time handing out millions of dollars of bonuses to bureaucrats and failed health executives. It was around this time that Alberta once again began running budget deficits, bringing the government's ongoing personal abuse of tax dollars into much sharper focus and underscoring the need for major reforms to how politicians and public servants are paid.

Fast forward a few years, and we're on the eve of a provincial election. The now infamous no-meet committee has been exposed, and Albertans are angrier than ever not only at the inflated salaries and benefits MLAs collect at their expense but also at how complicated it is to navigate all the hidden pots of money that MLAs are paid. Because of these events, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that Albertans are probably more interested than ever in how much we are paid and why. So it's good that we're here today in the Legislature, ready to finally act on what Albertans have been telling us for so long.

I've often said, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier shouldn't have needed a judge to tell her what the right thing was to do, but that's a discussion for another day.

Most of what Justice Major has recommended in his comprehensive report is quite good, and Wildrose does support most of it. For example, we support the idea of a single comprehensive base MLA salary that encompasses the entire scope of a member's job; no extra pay for committees, just a flat salary that is easy to understand and easy to track and lower than what it was under the old system. That's what Albertans were asking for.

We also like where Justice Major suggested going with transition allowances, replacing the current golden parachutes, which saw some MLAs departing with over a million dollars, with a more reasonable package intended to help MLAs with a short-term transition into life after politics. The government has decided to go further and eliminate it altogether on a go-forward basis, and we have no objection to that either.

Additionally, we were pleased to see the government reject some of Justice Major's more troublesome recommendations like yet another huge pay increase for the Premier and also keeping the tax-free portion of MLA salaries. Albertans cannot shield one-third of their salaries from tax, and their elected representatives should not be allowed to either.

Before this goes to committee, there are a couple of things I urge my colleagues in all parties, especially the members of the Members' Services Committee, to consider as we move forward. The first is cabinet salaries. The Major report worked off current salary levels, which essentially means that the excessive cabinet pay hikes are the starting point. The report even recommended an additional increase to cabinet pay, but that doesn't mean that we can't now revisit this issue, finally. As MLAs we have the ability and, I would say, the obligation to look at this and get it right. In Members' Services Committee we look forward to raising this issue and arriving at a sensible solution because no one I spoke to during the recent election told me that they thought cabinet ministers needed a pay raise.

The second is the gold-plated pension plan that Justice Major has recommended. Let me be perfectly clear, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely cannot go back to this. Premier Ralph Klein was right to have killed these pensions almost 20 years ago. Reinstating them would be a slap in the face to Alberta taxpayers and hard-working Alberta families. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has done some wonderful research showing why that is. For starters, an average Albertan would have to save \$822,000 in order to equal the benefits a gold-plated pension plan would pay out to retiring or defeated MLAs. That is not a figure that most Albertans can even relate to.

The CTF also reports that unfunded pension liabilities in Alberta have reached \$11 billion, including \$42 million still remaining on the old MLA pension plan Premier Klein got rid of. These unfunded liabilities have spooked just about every private-sector pension plan away from defined benefit plans and for good reason. As the CTF points out, the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada reported in 2010 that more than 90 per cent of private-sector defined benefit pension plans have become virtually insolvent after 2008.

The most compelling reason to throw out gold-plated pensions really has little to do with facts and figures and dollars and cents. It's about leadership. It's about what accepting something like this says about us as politicians and officials elected to do the people's business and guard the public's dollars. If we accept this gold-plated pension plan, we merely affirm that which most people already believe about their politicians, thanks in no small part to this government's self-serving ways, that we aren't really interested in serving the public and doing what's right, and we're merely here for what we stand to gain from it. By jumping on the first opportunity we have to pad our bank accounts, we would give

the public every reason to believe this. That's why I'd like us to make a stand on this, to give Albertans at least a small reason to have confidence in us.

3:20

I know that every member of the Official Opposition is ready to lead the way on this, and I know that both myself and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek are ready to convince our colleagues on the Members' Services Committee to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Motion 11.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak to this motion although I'm going to come at it a bit differently than everyone else has. I and my caucus have a very, very strongly held belief that MLAs should not be setting their own pay and perks. We raised this in a number of different venues and as a reaction to different proposals about pay schedules and things that were being raised in the Members' Services Committee a number of times. It was our standard response. We really, really believe this.

We were very happy to have one of our members, who's now one of the members of the government caucus, bring forward a motion. We don't get many motions, the opposition, because as some of you know and some of you don't, all private members are treated the same. Well, this would be my argument with the Government House Leader. All of our names are put into a pool, and the order for the private members' motions and bills are drawn from that, so Official Opposition and third-party and fourth-party opposition don't get a lot of chance at this. For us to take one of our motions and designate it to this tells you how important it was. It was brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East, and in fact it was unanimously passed. It was pretty clear that there was to be an independent commission to set the MLA pay and benefits.

Now, what did we actually get from this? What we got from it is an independent commission. Okay. Fine. I will quibble with the way it was set up in that it went to the Speaker of the day, who set it up with some criteria that raised eyebrows and set this all on a certain course. But we did end up with an independent commission, a one-person commission of Justice Major, who then presented a report.

Did we accept that report? Well, no. What we're hearing here is the ensuing debate, which will inevitably end with MLAs setting their own pay and benefits, which was not where we started. What we've already got is cherry-picking in this very motion that I am debating. We have the government saying, "We accept the report except certain things," and they can spell them out. At this point I don't care what the certain things are anymore because we have lost the ability to stand up and say: we accept this report.

We charged them to do a certain thing, we said we wanted someone else to do this, and what are we going to do? We're spending time in this House debating it again, MLAs talking about setting their own pay and perks. The government motion starts it out by saying that we're not going to accept this, that, and the next thing. They're cherry-picking off the report. We like this, but we don't like that. Okay-dokey, then.

What's going to happen after this? Oh, wait. It's going to get sent to the Members' Services Committee. Now, that is an all-party legislative committee, much respected, much feared. I'm sorry. Who's sitting on this again? Oh, right. A majority of the people sitting there are government members, and there are a small number of participants on that committee who represent the Official Opposition, the third party, and the fourth party. That group is

going to decide how to implement this and is additionally charged with working out some of the details on things like the pension plan. Correct me if I'm wrong, but are we now not sending this to a group of MLAs to decide their own pay and benefits? Yes, we are. Right there we've contravened what we said we would do.

We all said in this House – and it was unanimous on the day – that we would support an independent commission setting this, and we've already managed to work that around way back to the Members' Services Committee, which the previous speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition, in such an eloquent way outlined where all of these problems started. Wait for it. I'm waiting. My ear is out. Yes, indeed, that would be the Members' Services Committee who decided to set all of these things, and now we are going to send this back to the Members' Services Committee to decide the pay and perks. What is wrong with this picture? What's wrong with this is that we've already violated where we started.

Now, I've got all kinds of, you know, quibbles and suggestions and things that I'd like in there and not like in there. I was one of the few MLAs that actually signed up and went to the commission and put it on record. In fact, my *Hansard* appears at the back of the report. I was very concerned that the commission be aware of a couple of things. One is that not all private members are equal. Government private members are more equal than other private members. I wanted that known and understood because that really matters when you're talking about pay and benefits. Of course, if you're taking the best years of earning, anyone that's sitting on the government side was earning extra money by being appointed to government-only committees or to chair a government-only arm's length group.

The Seniors Advisory Council – that was always a government MLA, and it came with a salary of 40,000 bucks a year – and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities: all of those were paid additional money. At one point they were so desperate to find a job for their one last backbench MLA that didn't have an extra job that they booted the person who was currently the chairperson for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities so they could put their own backbencher in there. I'm going back quite a few years on that one, but people will be able to figure out who I'm talking about.

There were lots of things that each of us could contribute to this discussion. You know, I wanted it known that not all private members are equal. I wanted it known that for people that were coming from the not-for-profit sector or the public service sector, which is half of our working population here in Alberta – we love to talk about the entrepreneurs. I love you, entrepreneurs, because you're making us all money, and it's a talent I don't have, and I'm incredibly in awe of all of you. But, God bless you, you are half of the workforce.

The other half of the workforce are people that work in the public service and the NGO sector. You've got to understand that most of them are not paid well enough to be able to sock away money on a regular basis for a pension to begin with, and the best working years in the not-for-profit sector are 35 to 55, which is exactly our age. So anyone coming here from the NGO sector is going to end up with a significant payment deficit in order to perform the service of representing the public here. I wanted people to understand that and to know it and to work it into what they were doing. I wanted to make that point.

I wanted to make the point that, you know, you shouldn't be basing things on a situation where one group is significantly disadvantaged over the others, which is what I've just been talking about, that the transition allowance was incredibly important to

people that were going back into the NGO sector, and I used myself as an example there.

I also wanted to quibble with the criteria comparisons. If you look on page 11 of the report, you know, the benchmarks that were set there were against Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial parliaments, fair enough, but Alberta Queen's Bench and Provincial Court judges – yikes – or senior public service in Alberta, including provincial, university, municipal, education, and health care sector? Well, gee whiz. The guy that heads up AIMCo for the province makes 2 million bucks. I'm just not in that league, and I don't think I should be compared to him.

I'd like to have known how I measured up against a plumber or an unionized iron worker or a high school principal or a wage earner or even a high wage earner where there was no job security. We have four-year job security, right? So I wanted to know how we compared there, and was it fair? Did we fit into that strata of people? I've got a lot of plumbers and high school teachers and wage earners in my life and in my constituency. I'm just not moving in that rarified strata of, you know, government mandarins and judges. That's a different level for me. So I would have preferred different criteria. But, you see, we could all cherry-pick about how we want this to go, right?

3:30

During the election a lot of people weighed in on this one, and credit goes to the Wildrose for whipping this one into a true frenzy, with froth on top and sprinkles and a cherry. Really, what people said is: "We want you to be reasonably paid. We don't want you to be paid crap. We don't want you to be paid the best in the world." Fair enough. That's why I was interested in where I came in with the plumber and the teacher and all of those people. They wanted that pay to recognize the responsibility, to recognize the leadership, to recognize the hours.

We do work a lot of weekends and a lot of evenings. I will tell you that you all will get to a point where you will think: "God, if I blew off this event, I'd be blowing off 80 bucks. Would I pay \$80 to sit at home in pajamas and eat a grilled cheese sandwich?" You will all come to that point where you make that decision because we do work a lot at night and on the weekends, and that's part of what we are paid to do or that the pay should recognize.

Also, for those that travel away from home, that's a lot of time away from your family. It's a lot of time away from your family.

All of those things need to come into that mix about how we're paid. Essentially, we should be paid reasonably. It should be transparent so that anybody can figure out how we're paid. That means that with that taxable allowance, although, in fact, it's a deal from the federal government, now we're going to make taxpayers pony up the money for us to give to the feds. Yikes. Why are we doing that? But it will make it more transparent, and I'm willing to do that in order to make it more transparent.

You know, I could go on and on about the things I like and the things I don't like, but the point of this whole thing and where I started is that it's about payment, and it's also about what we do for that payment.

My last point that I want to make is that we have absolutely no balance, no measurement that the public can use against us. There is no code of conduct for MLAs except that you must be here in question period, and if you're not, they'll start to dock your pay. Aside from that, there is nothing in anything we do that says that you have to open a constituency office, that you have to be there, that you have to return phone calls to constituents, that you have to meet with constituents. All of those things I have seen not done in my time in this Assembly. We had MLAs whose offices were locked, and you had to phone and prove who you were in order to

get an appointment. We've had all kinds of variations on that, so what we do need is a code of conduct.

If you are going to have a salary where we are paid reasonably, where there's a pension or a transition allowance, there must be something on the other side that balances this that says: "Here's the code of conduct. You must have a constituency office. You must have it open at some kind of published hours. You know, you have an obligation to meet with and speak to your constituents." I mean, beyond that, we can get into another level of detail, but do you see what I'm saying? I'd be right PO'd if I was an Albertan, too. We're going to pay these guys to go to Edmonton and do what? Talk? Yeah, let me in on this one.

How do they gauge our performance? They can't. All they can do is look at how many times we turn up in the media. Is that a good way of understanding what a good job we've done or what a bad job we've done? Careful how you answer that one. We need to be able to stand up and say to people: yes, this is a reasonable way to pay us, and this is the independent commission that we had tell us. But we also need to be able to stand up and say: fair enough; this is how you measure me. We need to have that code of conduct and to put it out there so that we can be measured against it because right now we don't. There is no way for any of our constituents and Albertans to say, "My MLA is meeting the minimum requirements" because there aren't any. No wonder they do not like paying us the money that we're getting paid.

Now, back to the beginning: code of conduct, and this is the report that we commissioned. Like it or not, suck it up, Sunshine. This is what we got back. You can argue that they got the wrong criteria and all the other arguments I've made here. The truth of it is that we said that we would abide by the independent commission that gave us the answer to this, and I want to see if you're going to do that. Right now, if you agree to Motion 11, you are agreeing to the government starting to cherry-pick which of these things they will accept and not accept out of the report. The deal was: we don't set our salaries.

Can you tell me, anybody, if the chairman of Syncrude or the chairwoman of Suncor or Nexen or anybody gets to set their own salary? Anybody? We've got somebody from the oil and gas sector here. Are they setting their own salary?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: They negotiate.

Ms Blakeman: They're negotiating it. You're darn right.

Do they get to just say, "I'm going to get paid this much money and these many perks"? No, they don't. They have to negotiate to get it. Well, our negotiation was that we hand it over to this independent commission, and they're going to tell us what you're going to get back. That's the deal, my friends, and you better stand back. You'd better stand on that one because otherwise we've broken our own faith. That's all I want to say.

I won't be supporting Government Motion 11, Mr. Speaker, because it breaks that faith of an independent commission that we would abide by and brings us right back into that circle of MLAs deciding their own pay and perks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anyone have questions to the previous speaker or comments with respect to anything that was said by that speaker. No one under 29(2)(a)? Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're up under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Swann: Sorry. Yeah.

The Speaker: Proceed with 29(2)(a), then.

Dr. Swann: I'd be interested to hear from the hon. member if there are other jurisdictions that are actually implementing codes of conduct or job descriptions that could hold us more accountable for the pay and perks that we receive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm not aware of any other jurisdictions that do that, but to be perfectly honest, I didn't research it. To be even more blunt about it, I don't care. I think it's what we do, and it's how I hold myself accountable to the people that I represent. I really don't care what they're doing in P.E.I. or in the Yukon. I think what's important is how we set ourselves up, and that's very important to me.

I've done a lot in my years to be as transparent as possible to my constituents, to be accountable, to let them look at the work I'm doing and criticize me for what I'm doing. I publish an annual report every year. Actually, when I started 15 years ago, I did one paper annual report, that went in the mail. Because of the wonderful technology we have, I now do an annual report that goes in the mail and on the website, which you also have to have now. So I have a website. Then about once a month I do an e-zine on important issues that come out of the House. I also work on Twitter and on Facebook. Yikes.

I publish how I spend the constituency budget every year in that annual report. It goes out every time, and it says: this is how much was on salaries and who got paid out of it. You've got to be careful there because you don't want people to be able to sort of go: well, your constituency assistant makes this much money, then, right? You've got to give an overall statement there: how much is spent on rent, how much we spend on promotional items, and how much we spend on mailing and the annual report. All of that is broken out. I've published it for 16 years now, and I invite people to come in and look at my books if they want to. They're more than welcome to do that.

It is about accountability, to me, and I think it's important that we have that code of conduct as the other side of our payment. I don't know of anyone else that goes into a job without some kind of job description and some kind of code that they're measured against as to whether they've accomplished that. So I don't care what anyone else does. I think it's important – and it's important to me – that we do the best we can to do that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. I was listening to the hon. member speak, and I completely agree with the importance of a code of conduct, but I have questions about whether or not the code of conduct should be set by this Assembly. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the requirement to have an office: in my constituency, which is four and a half hours from one end of the constituency to the other, would the code of conduct require that I have two?

My constituents expect to see me at every public event – graduations, parades, rodeos, and fairs – while her constituents might not or at least not in 44 different communities. I'm wondering why, when we're trying to improve democracy, the code of conduct would be written by members of this Assembly instead of the people in our constituencies, who hold our code of conduct up to us every single day and especially every four years during an election.

Ms Blakeman: I don't know that it does necessarily have to be written by us. I just think that there needs to be a baseline code of conduct. You're right; your people expect you to be at absolutely everything. My people expect that even more. Your people know that you're going to be on the highway for two and a half hours or three hours. Mine know I'm not. They know that I can put on my running shoes and walk to their event in 20 minutes. So I had bloody well better be at every single event they want me at, and I am. We have different requirements, and we all work our constituencies differently.

3:40

The bottom line is: what is the minimum standard of what we should be doing? That's what I was aiming for here, not how many offices you have but that there is a constituency office of some kind in some place that you do have public hours for. In other words, the public can access you. Maybe that's a virtual thing. Maybe you do that by skyping at a certain time, at a certain point. I don't know.

The point is that, yes, we are measured every four years by our constituents, but I think there has to be another way. As I say, in my time here I have seen abuse. I have seen MLAs that, you know, don't participate in question period at all, or they won't let people come into their constituency office, or they refuse to do any casework for their constituents. I think there has to be a minimum that we can all work from, and it shouldn't be hard to meet that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Speaker's Ruling Speaking Order

The Speaker: Just before we go on with the speaking rotation, a request has been made with respect to what the speaking order or speaking sequence should be. I want to say that on this particular point we try to observe tradition in the House, where if there are a number of speakers, we don't normally recognize two people in a row who are from the same party. Similarly, we usually don't go back to a party that has already spoken when there is a third one who has not spoken.

These are customs and traditions that do not find themselves in our standing orders per se. In my time in the chair I can tell you that we've tried to develop a system to adhere to, and it seldom, if ever, really works, which is why there is nothing in the standing orders, I suspect.

There will be occasions that occur when people have to leave early or a sudden occurrence has happened and they have to leave early, or they have a flight to catch or whatever it might be. We have no way of knowing how long a particular person might wish to speak. At the moment we're speaking either 90 minutes in the case of the Official Opposition leader, and others are speaking 20 or 15 plus five or whatever it might happen to be when we bring in 29(2)(a).

However, on this particular occasion I've already indicated a speaking order, so I want to revisit that. In the spirit of fairness, I would ask your agreement to alter the speaking order to allow the Member for Airdrie to go next, then the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and then the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Otherwise, we tend to chair the Assembly and the speaking order based on notes that come in to us or previously provided speaking order lists, just so that we're clear. If no one objects to that, then I would recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie to go next.

I'll invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to make a comment although I hesitate getting into a debate on this, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much for the caution, Mr. Speaker. Under 13(2) could the Speaker explain? My understanding was that we do go back and forth between the government members and the opposition members, but I take it that today – and that's why I'm asking for the explanation – there are no government members who are indicating they wish to participate, and therefore you have only opposition members to deal with. Is that what's at issue here?

The Speaker: All I can tell you, hon. member, is that I have three people who've indicated a wish to speak, so I've just clarified that. I thank you for the observation. Should more names come forward onto the speaking list, we'll be happy to add them accordingly.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand and respond to Government Motion 11. I'd like to thank my colleague and the leader of our party for her kind comments. As much as I'd like to claim a lot for this progress, I would have to defer on that and say that, actually, the largest reason that we're here today debating an actual decrease from the recommendations given by Justice Major is because for the first time in 40 years the government opposite had the life scared out of them in the last election by this member and by my colleagues. That is the true reason because I know that in this House when I brought it up – and I made many arguments – I wasn't very successful. So something changed over that 28-day period, and I don't think it was the hearts of the members opposite as much as they would like to claim.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

I think that we should give a round of applause to the new chair for her first time here. [applause] All right. Oh, everyone is so happy.

Albertans made two primary decisions during this last election. First, obviously, they decided to give the PC Party a likely final chance to get their ship and house back in order. This was a testament to their brand and the longevity of their brand, their aggressive and very negative campaign tactics during the 28-day writ period, some good, old-fashioned race baiting, and other things like that. Also, as well as the need for a more experienced alternative, we forget here that the Wildrose had exactly zero seats after the 2008 election. It's very difficult to ask the people of Alberta to hand over the keys to a \$40 billion province to a party that had zero seats after the last election, so I think that the common sense and the overall judgment of Albertans was sound in this regard.

Albertans also made it equally clear that they wanted a strong, viable, and fiscally responsible Official Opposition that could develop into a seasoned, alternative government-in-waiting should the PCs repeat their last four years of poor governance. Clearly – clearly – they liked a lot of what they heard. There are just, certainly, some edges they wanted to be sanded off, and we will sand them.

As it pertains to MLA pay and perks, Albertans' decision to elect a strong and fiscally sound Official Opposition has certainly already begun to pay off. Several months ago, after becoming

Premier, this Premier appointed Justice John Major to review MLA pay and perks and insisted that whatever recommendations he came back with, whether it meant a raise or a cut, would be implemented with no questions asked. You all remember that, I think.

The Wildrose made it clear that this was unacceptable and that the Legislature should reject any salary increases and, in fact, should roll back the salary increase the cabinet gave itself, replace the annual RSP allowance with a modest defined contributions pension plan akin to what is found in the private sector, and cut MLA gold-plated severance packages. That, of course, was the subject of my Bill 202 over a year ago, which asked us to cut by two-thirds the pension and cap it and so forth. That was unanimously agreed to, is my recollection, by all opposition parties and caucus members. I could be wrong. Correct me if I'm wrong on that. Maybe not, after hearing that last speech. But it was unanimously voted against by every single member opposite, and that needs to be remembered.

The Premier, of course, was outraged with the Wildrose proposal. Obviously, her government, as I said, voted against my private member's Bill 202, the Legislative Assembly (Transition Allowance) Amendment Act, 2011, which would have cut the MLA severance. She was quoted in the *Calgary Sun* on January 21, 2012 – this is the Premier – as saying, "Whatever Jack Major says is what we're going to do. I've been very clear on that . . . You don't ask Jack Major to write a report and then tell Jack Major what to [do]." No, you sure don't.

During the election the Premier attacked the hon. Official Opposition leader during the debate for saying that the Wildrose would go ahead and cut cabinet salaries and MLA benefits regardless of what the Major report said. Of course, the famous quote is: I don't need a judge to tell me what the right thing to do is.

The Premier said, as reported in the *Edmonton Journal* on April 13, 2012, in response to the Official Opposition leader, that "you have to decide if you want an independent process or if you want to control your own salary," arguing that the independent process was best. This debate attack followed an April 9, 2012, PC press release scolding the Wildrose for its MLA pay position as follows:

The Wildrose would immediately put MLA pay in the hands of MLAs, an inherent conflict of interest. [The Premier] has committed to implementing the recommendations of the independent review of MLA pay by . . . Justice John Major.

3:50

Following the election Justice Major came out with his report, of course, and sure enough it called for a huge increase in the Premier's salary, a slight downward adjustment in the golden MLA severance packages, and a defined benefits pension plan. Oops. The Premier's response, although completely inconsistent and very hypocritical of her previous statements, was, however, the right thing to do. She ignored the recommended increases to her salary and instead adopted the Wildrose position, or most of our position, on the matter. She got rid of the gold-plated severance packages, declined the wage increase, and asked the Members Services' Committee to put the defined benefits pension proposal on hold and to consider whether to instead adopt a more fiscally sound defined contributions pension plan, a very good idea. Strong, principled, and fiscally prudent opposition matters, and although the Premier's hypocrisy on this issue is somewhat difficult to stomach, it's better late than never.

We are happy the tax-free allowance has been jettisoned after being hammered by the other side for saying that it should be jettisoned, saying, "Oh, we're giving all this money to Ottawa that

we wouldn't otherwise give Ottawa." Well, that may be true, but the point of the matter is that what's good for Albertans is good for their representatives. If they have to pay taxes federally, we pay taxes federally.

The Premier's salary increase of 25 per cent that was recommended by Justice Major is being declined by the Premier. We agree with that although we should be rolling back those cabinet salaries by 34 per cent. That would have been even better.

Also, as someone who's always advocating that wages and costs and government spending be capped at the rate of inflation plus population growth, I'm glad to see in the report that MLA salaries will instead of being kept to the average weekly wage index go up with the rate of inflation, a very good adjustment.

Of course, we're all happy about the transition allowance decision.

Now, we don't agree, obviously, with the cabinet getting a salary increase. Although it is a modest one, there's still no excuse for it. There was a 34 per cent increase, so even this roughly \$5,000 increase that they should be getting under these recommendations is not appropriate, as modest as it may be. But we agree with most.

Now, the main outstanding issue, obviously, in this motion today is the issue of what form this new pension will take. The Wildrose strongly believes that a defined benefits pension is not acceptable. Defined benefits plans are causing havoc across the world right now, absolute economic carnage, for both large corporations, as we see with the auto industry in the United States and in Canada, as well as for governments, as we see right across Europe, the United States, and in provinces like Ontario, who just cannot manage it right now financially.

One of the biggest crises faced by Europe is the massive liability their public-sector pensions place on today's workforce, and the same problem, of course, crippled GM and Chrysler as well. Defined benefits plans are almost always unaffordable and cause ever-increasing liabilities for future generations of employees or, in this case, taxpayers. The private sector has always used defined contributions plans more than defined benefits precisely because they are more responsible and more fair. Where they have not, they have been bitten, and it has caused major problems.

Each person covered in a defined contributions plan gets a pension that more accurately reflects the amount they and their employer at the time contribute. There is no liability for future generations. That's the ethical part. Why should future generations pay for us? Why can we not make sure that we save enough in a defined contributions plan and be responsible for our own retirement rather than putting it on the backs of future generations, who may have to deal with all kinds of different problems: economic, social, and so forth?

If we are to have any credibility in making negotiations with the public-sector unions, we cannot be giving ourselves lavish pay and benefits. Who could fault whatsoever the health services workers for wanting a 3 per cent increase to their relatively low salaries when politicians in this Chamber had given themselves a 34 per cent increase just a few years earlier? That has shown in the way that the costs of wages in this province have shot up in a manner where even with oil at \$100 a barrel we still cannot balance the books. Think about that. It's because we have not controlled increases in wages and increases in government spending in general.

We will insist that there be a fair and affordable defined contributions model that we adopt so that all MLAs pay their fair share. To give you an idea of how unfair defined benefits plans are, especially when you are talking about people making salaries in the \$135,000 to \$200,000 range like MLAs and cabinet ministers,

here are some examples the CTF, or the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, put together. The CTF has calculated that under the MLA pension plan proposed by Justice Major, a three-term backbench MLA would stand to collect \$52,740 a year for life after three terms. Using the standard annuity calculator, the CTF determined a regular Albertan would have to have \$822,000 in savings to purchase a pension or joint life annuity that would pay the same amount.

Canadians are currently limited to putting no more than \$22,970 into RRSPs each year, roughly \$23,000, so it's tough to imagine how any Albertan could match their local MLA's pension. Perhaps this is the number, the \$23,000 a year, that we should use when we start talking about the defined contributions plan such as perhaps putting half of that amount, \$11,500, mandatorily into a member's RRSP, and then the remaining half, the additional \$11,500, being in a matching program, where the member can put up to \$5,750 into that pension, and it will be matched up to that limit. If the member only puts in \$500 after that year, then they only get \$500 in addition to the original \$11,500 that they got from the government for their RRSP.

That's just one idea. I throw it out there, and I look very much forward to hearing other members' ideas on the defined contributions plan. The point is that when we leave this Chamber after we're done our careers, whenever that is, or our terms in office, we need to be able to do so knowing that we haven't put anything on the backs of future generations. Then we can truly hold our heads up high. That would be the Wildrose way of doing things.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We now have five minutes for Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anybody would like to use it. Any takers?

We'll move on to the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and, as well, congratulations on your first time in the chair. Or Madam Chair of Committees. I'm not sure if you are Speaker when you're in the chair.

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker. There you go. Okay. At other times Madam Chair of Committees. Welcome to the chair.

I'm very pleased to be able to rise to speak to this issue, and I'll start by simply pointing out that our caucus will not be voting in favour of this motion. I'm going to try in a somewhat succinct but not prewritten way, so we'll see how well that goes, to outline the reasons for that.

Let me just begin by referring to the comments that were made previously by the Member for Edmonton-Centre about how our salaries are established and the reference that she made to one of the members of the government caucus around whether or not members negotiate or don't negotiate their salaries. I would just throw it out as one possible observation that one could characterize an election campaign where your salary is one of the primary election issues as a form of negotiation because, of course, what happens is that you either win or you lose. Some of you may not be aware, but... [interjection] Yes. It's sort of like negotiating with the federal Minister of Labour, you know? You're in or you're out. Usually out. In any event, it is arguably a form of negotiation when you go through that process.

4:00

People may or may not be aware. As you know, this issue, as previously mentioned, was the topic of much debate over the course of the election. It was a very popular topic of debate in my particular constituency and in relation to my own candidacy. I will say that not only I but also many of my volunteers on my campaign did spend a great deal of time talking to people in the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona about the issue of MLA pay, so I think I can come here with some sense of what people's opinions on this issue are.

Some people have outlined this to some extent. People want to see us paid transparently. They want to see us paid equitably. They want to see the work that we do fairly compensated. They don't want to see us go behind closed doors, and they don't want to see any kind of situation that could be characterized either by appearance or by substance as being, you know, sort of behind-closed-door fixing of things for our own benefit. Basically, they want a common-sense, fair approach to this process, and that's hardly surprising.

Now, the question of whether or not this Assembly or members of this Assembly or a subcommittee of members of this Assembly should be the ones tasked with setting our salary or whether, alternatively, a judge should be tasked with setting our salary is not actually an easy question to answer. The immediate assessment of this issue when you first look at it, when you first come to it, is to say: "No. Let's independently have some third-party group establish our salary for us, and that way we can remove all appearances of corruption or self-interest and all those things."

I remember the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who himself has advocated for that, at the same time cautioning, talking about his own experience in municipal government where a council that he was a member of had embarked upon that process only to discover that the independent organization recommended such a ridiculous increase that there was no politically sustainable way you could accept that increase. So he was very conscious that that's always a risk that you run.

Clearly, that is the issue that the members of this Assembly are now wrestling with because we had a number of recommendations come back which, quite frankly, go well beyond that sort of sense of common sense or common fairness or what you would expect to be able to go out onto the street with and talk to your constituents about and have them embrace. For instance, the proposed raise for the Premier really seemed a bit much.

I understand why it is that the Assembly and the government particularly are bringing forward a motion to refine, shall we say, the report issued by Mr. Justice Major. Politics is politics, and it is a different beast. It is the way we work now. It's a real thing, and you can't deny it. You can take a very sort of neutral, objective, well-researched approach to things, but you need to know that politics is another thing altogether. So how do you balance those things?

There are some good things associated with this motion that I would like to just put on the record that we do agree with. We agree with the recommendation to increase transparency of our salaries by getting rid of the tax-free element of the allowance. I think that the extra cost to do that is justified because it gets to that issue of transparency. So that's a good recommendation.

We also support the elimination of the transition allowance. When the transition allowance was first passed by members of the current government, back in about 2000, the only member in the Legislature to vote against it when it passed the committee was the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. We've got a long, strong record on saying that that transition allowance was well outside of what reasonable people could expect to receive, so it's

hardly surprising that we're happy to see that that message has finally been heard.

Then, obviously, we support the notion of not moving forward with the proposed increase for the Premier because, frankly, there are too many things going on in this province that would just make it too hard for anybody to stomach if we also at the same time saw that type of raise – 100 per cent, 150 per cent raise – for the person who's ultimately responsible for the economic well-being of not just a few Albertans but all Albertans. I'll talk about that in a moment.

Those things in the motion, then, are good things. There are also good things in the report as a whole, which this motion is asking us to accept with the exception of those things that have been highlighted in the motion. I am pleased to see that the report is finally recommending that which the Member for Edmonton-Centre raised, which is the ridiculous inequity of the compensation that existed between government members and opposition members up to the last month and a half, the fact that on average government backbenchers earned about \$15,000 a year more than opposition backbenchers. That always just seemed to me to be a ridiculously unfair and unreasonable distinction, so I'm glad to see that that has been removed.

I'm also glad to see, of course, that we've finalized the process of getting rid of committee pay because apart from sort of the complexity of ensuring that taxpayers understand what they're paying to people and what they're paying them for, there's also the whole issue of the discretionary pay control that resides particularly in the Premier's office vis-à-vis a number of their members as well as if you have a large enough caucus in the leaders' offices in other caucuses. People's salaries can be significantly increased or decreased depending on who they're nice to or who they're not nice to on any given day. I don't think that as members of the Assembly we should have a third or a quarter or whatever element of our salary subjected to those kind of internal discretionary political games, so I'm glad that that's been eliminated.

In terms of things in this motion that I have some concern about, one of the things is the fact that we are sending the issue of pensions back to the Members' Services Committee. Pensions are a very loaded issue, and they're also a way in which people can either increase or decrease the value of their overall package without anybody understanding exactly what has happened there. It's a really, really hard thing to track. We are in fact taking that back to the committee, and it's going to be quite an interesting debate as we watch how that unfolds.

Ultimately, our position is that we want to ensure that while we think some type of pension is reasonable, we certainly don't want to see the MLAs in Alberta getting way ahead of the curve in terms of what is received in other jurisdictions, or way behind, and that it be in line with what working people in Alberta can expect to receive.

I want to distinguish, however, a little bit our position from some of the points that have been made by members of the Official Opposition caucus and, I suspect, some members of the government caucus as well. I know that when the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and their friends in the governing caucus and their friends in the Official Opposition caucus engage in their slashing and burning and cutting and cutting and cutting campaigns, the first thing they do is that they haul out the word "gold-plated," and they attach it to whatever it is that they're attacking: gold-plated welfare benefits, gold-plated pension plans, gold-plated transition allowances. Some of them are gold plated. They never seem to say gold-plated oil and gas company subsidies

though. Strange that we haven't seen gold-plated attached to that. It's a bit of a tried-and-true strategy.

What I want to say on behalf of working people in this province and across the country is that, in fact, we have a crisis in our retirement planning and in our pension funding and that the answer is not to simply shortchange working people and to suddenly decide that defined benefit plans are evil and that the only thing we can responsibly do is take yet more money away from low-income and middle-income working families just the way the federal Conservatives are about to do with the employment insurance plan. That action, those horrendous proposals that we're seeing federally with the employment insurance plan, is something that's being orchestrated by the same group of folks that want to see defined benefit pension plans eliminated, and they want to see working families' wages and incomes generally suppressed. I don't buy into that analysis.

4:10

Now, as an MLA I don't believe that I need to have a defined benefit plan, and I'm going to see what is a modest, reasonable approach in the long run. Obviously, MLAs don't devote 25, 30 years – most of us don't – to this job, so it's a different model. But average working Albertans and average working Canadians: they need security and the ability to plan in the future for their retirement, and if they do that with a modest, defined benefit pension plan, so be it.

With this government and the former Energy minister at the time – I think I can say his name now because he's no longer a member – Ted Morton, aggressively fighting against reform of our Canada pension plan, which would have assisted low-income, long-time working families, I find it very, very hard then to get on the bandwagon that wants to attack the retirement earnings of people who don't earn the kind of money that we earn. I need to put that on the record because I really don't like the conversation that's been had so far and the misrepresentation about the value of defined benefit pension plans to working people in this province and across the country.

As I say, I'm certainly not suggesting that MLAs need to have a defined benefit plan. We are in a different situation. I also want that to be very clear.

The other things in the report that are ultimately going to result in our voting against this motion are the things that I'll get to now, though. What this motion will do is it will ensure that we adopt the salary proposal, the general indemnity proposal that was in the Major report. In doing that, our basic salary will be roughly \$134,000 a year. That will make us the highest paid group of legislators in the country save for the House of Commons. If you factor in the proposed pension stuff – and we don't know if it will go up or if it will go down – we'll still be in the top third. Now, that would be fine if I could look at our province and say: darn, we've done such a great job of managing this province, and everybody is sharing in this wealth, so that's reasonable that I'd be one of the most highly paid MLAs in the country. But the problem is that that's not the case.

We have the greatest disparity between rich and poor in this province in the country. We have the lowest minimum wage in the country. People in our caucus and on behalf of our caucus cannot then vote for a motion that would see us giving ourselves the highest salary in the country. It can't be done. If government wants to come back to us with finally revising our minimum wage to a point that is just and equitable, wants to come forward with an antipoverty campaign that's less about planning for planning for more planning with more consultations and a couple of conferences and some conventions over the next five years but actually a budget,

well, we'll talk. But until that happens, we really struggle with the idea of giving ourselves that kind of raise.

I think that pretty much summarizes where we're going with this. I think there have been improvements, and I do appreciate the work that was done by Justice Major. I think most people here are generally trying to do the best thing, but we will not be supporting this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We now have Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anyone would like to participate in that.

Seeing no one, we'll move on to the next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Clear Mountain View. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to stand and speak to this motion, which, as my colleague from Edmonton-Centre indicated, we will be voting against. In addition, I want to be very clear that I would hope that with this motion, which is likely to be passed given the dominance of one party in this House, although it's not explicit, this Premier and this cabinet cannot interfere with a decision made by this Legislature between now and the next review, which is what happened in the previous administration, where the Premier and cabinet chose to give themselves a significant boost through order in council, I believe. It's not exactly clear to me that explicit in this motion it precludes this government from meddling in the pay and benefits that this body is about to adopt.

Madam Speaker, trust is the only real currency we have in politics, and whatever we do as policy-makers to enhance that public trust is to the good of democracy, to the good of engagement of citizens, and to the good of better public policy. Whatever we do that undermines trust is truly going to damage all of us, our citizens, our democracy, and our engagement in creating a better province, especially in this, perhaps the least trusted profession. I take that on the basis of studies.

We have to be especially transparent, accountable, and conscious of conflicts of interest, and what is a bigger conflict of interest than setting your own pay and benefits, yet we've been doing it for decades. So I think it's very clear that the time has come to have an independent commission, not only an independent commission but an independent commission with teeth, a commission that is actually going to impose its guidelines on this Legislature so that there can be no perception and no reality of interference or meddling or serving our own interests by setting our own salary and benefits.

It must be clear that we are acting in every way in the public interest. Fairly or unfairly, this government has shown itself unwilling to address many areas of conflict of interest. That's the role of the opposition, I think, to point that out and to make very clear that there is an accountability required of government and that all of us have to be accountable for our actions and our words. We will never be seen as independent and fair making decisions in this Legislature relating to our own salaries and benefits.

As the Leader of the Opposition I pressed for two things with the previous Premier: the independence and authority of this committee and, secondly, that a committee representing someone from the nonprofit as well as the government sector and the private sector be set up to provide some balanced approach to this whole question. Neither of those things were adopted, and that's the government's prerogative to set up the panel that they chose. But having done so, I think we're under obligation to adopt the recommendations we established.

Having said that, I want to say a little bit about what might appear to be an unrelated issue, but in fact I see a tremendous connection between the perception of our role as government members in serving our constituents and the plight of farm workers in this province. Not only do they not get access to the labour code as paid farm workers – so the standards of pay and benefits do not apply to the food producers in this province – they do not enjoy the occupational health and safety standards that the rest of workers enjoy, they do not enjoy workers' compensation for injuries and death in this province by legislation, and they are precluded from forming a union to act on their own behalf. If that isn't enough, there are no child labour standards in this province for paid farm workers.

We are talking about salaries and benefits here which we have traditionally set ourselves, and at the same time we have ignored, in fact snubbed, the rights of farm workers, those that feed us on a daily basis. This is a travesty, and it has to stop. I think more and more people, as they're becoming aware of it, are going to ask for this kind of leadership for our farm workers, our agriculture workers.

It is in some ways peripheral to the issue of salary and benefits. In some ways it points to severe evidence of conflict of interest and lack of attention to the public interest when a whole sector of our society, agriculture workers, are excluded from these most basic of rights, as distinct from all other paid working groups.

This is something that I will be raising repeatedly, that our paid farm workers, two of whom are in the audience today, will continue to hammer away at until this government gets it. There are farmers' rights organizations. There are not farm workers' rights organizations allowed in this province to advocate on their behalf.

4:20

With those comments in mind we'll be voting against this motion. Again, trust has to be at the forefront of everything that we decide and everything that we communicate if we're going to engage Albertans in ensuring a healthy democracy. It's very clear to me that in spite of commitments to an independent commission, we are again meddling with recommendations that we said we wanted and that we would follow.

There's a real danger here that we are going to be seen once again in a conflict of interest, setting our own salary and benefits and not following the very recommendations, which, in fact, the Premier said she would follow. She said that she would set up an independent committee and follow the recommendations. So there's a real problem here with both perception and reality in terms of our continued conflict of interest as long as Members' Services is involved and as long as it's not clear – and I don't think it's clear in this motion – that this government cannot meddle in between the four-year periods that it has been recommended to have a review of salary and benefits.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Would any member like to speak on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I would ask if there are any other members that would like to speak to Motion 11? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's actually nice to see you in the chair. Congratulations on your first day sitting in the chair as Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we've put ourselves in what I consider an interesting dilemma on this particular motion. I'm going to talk a little bit about the fact of where I was, where I am today, and where I think we're going to go.

We've had many members discuss what they like about this particular motion and what they don't like about this particular motion. Madam Speaker, I have a report that's, I think, 357 pages. You'll remember, because we used to sit in the Legislature together on the same team, that I'm an avid reader and I'm an avid researcher. I was one of the people that read every page in the Health Quality Council, every single word. And the devil is always in the details. That's what I always try to find.

We have a brand new caucus here, and sometimes when you've been around a little while . . .

Mr. Anderson: A little while.

Mrs. Forsyth: A little while is a long while.

The Deputy Premier knows that I've been around for a while because I remember when I was advocating on his behalf with the PC caucus when he won by a landslide of six votes, I think it was, when he first got elected . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Three.

Mr. Anderson: Three. You guys have something in common now.

Mrs. Forsyth: Three. Yes.

. . . and encouraging the caucus at that time. Because we wanted him on our side, we thought it was important that he win. I don't know if I'm going to regret those words now, but certainly at that particular time it was important for me to advocate on his behalf for the PC Party at the time to pay for his judicial recount. I think we went three times. I can't even remember. It was a long time ago.

Anyhow, back to this. I just went through a judicial review, and I can tell you that it's not fun. I learned a lot from that, very interestingly enough, and some of that is what the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Centre, alluded to when she was speaking in regard to: how do you judge or how do you even pay what is a good MLA and what is a bad MLA?

As I was saying, I tried to talk to my caucus, and I said that the devil is in the details. We have the 357-page Major report, and as I indicated earlier, I haven't had a chance to read it. But I plan on reading it because the Official Opposition leader, my colleague that I have the privilege of sitting next to, and I are both on Members' Services. Knowing her as well as I do know her – and I've gotten to know her very well over the last two and a half years. She's an avid reader also, probably even more avid than I am about reading all sorts of reports, so I'll probably have to catch up to her on this particular read.

What I find most interesting – you know, I've listened intently in regard to the motion that's been moved by the hon. House leader. It talks about all of the things: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in principle" – in principle – "the recommendations of the Review of Compensation of Members of the Legislative Assembly."

Now, what's fascinating about this is that we're talking about a report that the Premier was over and over again talking about, the independent report that's going to be done by Justice Major, to the point where she criticized us as members, saying: how dare you? I

mean, I was in the Legislature watching her arm go up and down. “How dare you criticize or even think about getting involved in an independent report of the Legislature by a judge. This is going to be independent, and we’re going to accept all the recommendations.” You know, here we are just trying to offer what we thought was fair in regard to compensation.

Well, lo and behold, the independent MLA compensation review, all 357 pages of it, hits. I remember watching her on TV when this report came out. It was like a deer in the headlights: oh my, oh my, we can’t – can’t – accept that huge raise that he is recommending in the report. This is the independent report done by an independent judiciary that she was going to accept everything. Well, I mean, everyone in this House who’s political isn’t that stupid to say: well, I’m going to accept that huge raise on top of my 35 per cent raise that I accepted in I think it was 2007. I think Albertans would be really, really PO’d at the fact if all of a sudden I’m looking at a 70 per cent raise.

Madam Speaker, she’s not going to accept that, and Albertans bought into that quite quickly during the election: that’s good leadership; that’s fine, strong, good leadership, and we’re open and accountable, and we’re happy that you’ve done that. But don’t forget that previous to that you accepted a 35 per cent raise without any consultation with Albertans, and we knew Albertans didn’t like that because we heard that at the door.

It says:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve . . .

Approve.

. . . in principle . . .

Now, that’s interesting, “in principle.”

. . . the recommendations of the Review of Compensation of Members of the Legislative Assembly . . . and refer the Report to the Special Standing Committee on Members’ Services . . . for implementation where possible by June 30, 2012, subject to the following exceptions.

There we go.

Our wonderful Premier: “regarding salary for the Premier not be implemented.” Not. Well, that’s pretty darn smart. “But” – but; I love those buts – “that the Committee implement a salary that reflects a differential of +25% between the Premier’s salary and that of a Minister with Portfolio.” Now, don’t forget, Madam Speaker, that this is going to Members’ Services, and there are two of us and I can’t remember how many of them, so we’re not talking a lot of fairness there.

Then we go to:

that Recommendation 10 concerning the expense portion of a Member’s remuneration, known as the tax-free allowance, not be implemented and that the amount of that expense allowance be set at zero, pending an amendment to the Legislative Assembly Act to eliminate it.

Well, my colleague from Airdrie already mentioned that he brought this all forward on his private Bill 202 in – what was it? – 2011, which this government defeated.

4:30

Now, when you go back to that private member’s bill in 2011 and we talk about the gold-plated pensions, let’s not forget, Madam Speaker, that I’m one of those gold-plated pension, pork-barrelling piggies, as we got called and get referred to, who’s going to probably get a substantial amount of cash. When the member brought this particular bill forward, we sat down as a caucus, albeit a small caucus at that particular time, and had to have some serious discussions in regard to what he was bringing forward. And you know what? I agreed on that. I agreed on that not only in the Legislature, but I agreed on the fact that I ran

again, moving forward under that pretext if we would have formed government. So now my challenge is that all of the things that he brought forward under Bill 202 are all of the things the government wants to take the credit for now, which is very interesting.

Then we go on to the transition allowance, another thing, a duplicate of what my colleague the Member for Airdrie brought forward in 2011 under his private member’s Bill 202. They didn’t like it then, but all of a sudden now they like it. Fascinating.

Now, this is one of those time bombs that we have to be ready for:

that the committee examine alternatives to the pension plan for members proposed in recommendation 12 and discussed in section 3.5 of the report, including defined contribution plans, and report to the Assembly with its recommendations.

We’ve already had some discussions on that from several members. You know, time is of the essence. I know that some of our members, quite frankly, are quite excited about wanting to do their reply to the Speech from the Throne, so I’m not going to spend a lot of time, but I want to speak just for a minute on this. This, I think, is one of the key things. I’ve listened, and I haven’t picked this up from anybody within the Legislature speaking to this. We have this little letter B, and it says, “Be it resolved that nothing in this motion shall limit the committee’s ability to report to the Assembly on any other matter arising from the report.”

It’s a 357-page report. We have a Members’ Services Committee, that’s dominated by the government, and all of a sudden they might decide to pick out of this report anything that they might think is important: extra pay for ministers, basic salary plus extra pay for ministers. Level of compensation, I know, has been looked at. I think it’s about \$135,000 that they’re examining. I’ve lost track of what they’re recommending for a cabinet minister. I’ve even further lost track of what they’re going to now pay the Premier because it’s been very, very confusing on what they’re recommending.

Madam Speaker, I guess one of the things that I want to just briefly touch on and what bothers me more than anything is the government’s loose definition of the word “independent.” I just want to speak to that for a second. What frightens me and what concerns me when the government talks, insists, and carries on about this independent commission, that they were so proud of and were so bragging about – and we’ve got other independent commissions out there going on right now – is that when the report comes back, they pick and choose what they like and dislike within this independent report. That’s where the struggle is in regard to using the word “independent.”

We’ve got, you know, a judicial inquiry going on in health care on queue-jumping. Does that mean that that particular report will come back and that if the Premier doesn’t like that there are allegations of queue-jumping in the report, she’s not going to accept it?

That’s where we are today in this Legislature, discussing a motion on an independent report. We have said and our leader has said and our House leader has indicated the fact that we agree on some of the things that the motions are bringing forward, that we’re not opposed. The leader eloquently said way back during the election that she didn’t need a judge to tell her what Albertans wanted because we’ve listened to Albertans, and Albertans have clearly told us what they think is fair compensation, what they think is fair for MLAs to have.

We as an opposition will listen to the rest of the debate this afternoon. I found some very interesting things said through this whole debate. The leader and I will then go off to Members’ Services and see what happens from there, what the government

proposes in regard to the pension and how you define our pension plan. I think – and I’ve said this before – what bothers me is a government that cherry-picks . . . [Mrs. Forsyth’s speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Associate Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I don’t get to ask questions anymore, this is certainly my opportunity to ask questions. I was certainly amazed at the member’s comments about the government cherry-picking recommendations. She so glowingly spoke about the bill brought forward by the private member from Airdrie-Chestermere about MLA compensation and, particularly, the transition allowances and mentioned to the Assembly that she is going to be collecting one of these big transition allowances.

One of the things that there’s been lots of talk about in this debate is the integrity of politicians. One of my concerns always around debates on compensation for any elected office is that when you’re in the opposition, you can say anything but don’t have to be accountable for the actual implementation of this. We’ve seen this. We’ve seen Reform MPs that have campaigned on not taking the MP pension, and what are they doing right now? They’re taking it. We saw a member of this party’s caucus, who was defeated, who said that he was going to pay back every single penny for a committee, that he wasn’t going to do . . .

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

Mr. Fawcett: . . . and a leader that had promised Albertans during the election that he had in fact paid that back. Obviously, that wasn’t the case. Madam Speaker, my question to the member is . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We have a point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: A point of order on that last point. This member gets very busy, and sometimes I know he forgets to read newspapers and watch news. Obviously, under 23(h), (i), and (j) what he has said here is imputing, is likely to create disorder. The reason for that, Madam Speaker, is because this member knows full well that the former Member for Calgary-Glenmore went back to the LAO, asked how much he did receive in actual payment for that no-meet committee, as it was called, and was told by the LAO in a letter that he owed absolutely nothing. So, actually, the initial newspaper report was completely wrong in imputing that he had received a dime from that. He hadn’t received a dime. For this member to stand up and impute that member, who served very proudly in this Legislature, is shameful, and he should retract that statement immediately.

The Acting Speaker: We’ll hear from the hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. You know, I don’t think we need to waste a lot of time on it. I’ll certainly withdraw that comment. It was just in the context of my question to the member, and I certainly want to get to that, Madam Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Forsyth: Madam Speaker, I would be pleased, absolutely pleased to answer his question.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we’ll just have the associate minister ask the question first, and then you can answer it.

4:40

Mr. Fawcett: My question, you know, is: if the member is so exuberant about the bill brought forward because it was the right thing to do, what is the member doing with her transition allowance?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Madam Speaker, what I will be doing is accepting it, like everybody else. There is nothing else I can do.

The other thing. I mean, this member knows full well. He wants to talk about the fact that he’s Mr. I’m Good and Happy. I spoke in the Legislature exactly when he brought the bill forward, and he should go back to *Hansard*. I talked about the fact that I would be accepting that particular pension at that particular time and that there was some dilemma there.

I will tell him, when he wants to talk about integrity and he imputes one of our members, that I paid back in full, every cent, for the no-meet committee. We might as well read it into the record: \$24,624.72. Having said that, I would like to ask the member, since he’s so quick to jump up, if he would like to have all the members from his party, the PC Party, table what they’ve paid back also.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have a few minutes left under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is there anyone else that would like to ask a question?

Seeing none, we’ll move on. Are there any more members who would like to speak to Motion 11?

I would ask the hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it’s been an interesting review of the issues around MLA compensation. I think the one thing that I would like to say in closing debate is that a number of members opposite have expounded on the fact that we on this side, in particular our Premier, said that we need to have an independent commission to review MLA compensation. That’s responsive to the motion that was passed from Lethbridge-East’s motion in the House a number of years ago.

There was a period of time when the Speaker and Members’ Services attempted to fulfill that motion but didn’t get the co-operation it needed in terms of suggestions from various parties relative to how that independent commission might be populated. The Premier, immediately upon being elected leader of our party and installed as Premier of the province, made that request to the Speaker’s office, and the Speaker moved ahead with Members’ Services to have this commission put in place.

We now have the report. We said that we would ask the House to adopt the report when it came in, and that’s exactly what we’re doing. There’s been some quibbling about whether or not we’re adopting the report or whether, in fact, we’re setting our own pay. We are not setting our own pay. This report sets out a comprehensive level of MLA compensation, and what we’re asking Members’ Services to do is to put that in place.

The Premier has said that she doesn’t want to accept the pay which this report suggests should be afforded the Premier. We’re asking the Members’ Services Committee to honour that request.

With respect to the tax-free allowance the report allows two options. We've chosen the option which we think Albertans want, and I appreciate the support from the Official Opposition with respect to that, to say that we shouldn't have a tax-free allowance. Recommendation 1 was the grossed-up amount. Recommendation 10 said that he thought we should take an allowance, but he left that option open. We took the option that we think Albertans want, and we're asking Members' Services to implement that.

With respect to the transition allowance we suggest that the transition allowance which has been provided for in the report is fair. But, again, we've heard from Albertans that they don't want us to be seen to be taking more than a pay and an appropriate pension amount, and we believe that Members' Services can roll those two together and create a comprehensive, probably defined contribution pension process, which will be open and transparent to Albertans and within the parameters of what has been recommended by Mr. Justice Major.

I believe that we're fulfilling the obligation to say that we accept in principle what's being put forward in the report. We don't believe Members' Services should be tinkering with the pay of MLAs. We think we should adopt it essentially as it's been put forward.

Ms Blakeman: As you've cherry-picked it.

Mr. Hancock: It's not cherry-picking to suggest that when there are two options, you choose one of them. If there are two options, one having the grossed-up amount and the other having a tax-free allowance, choosing the grossed-up amount is not cherry-picking. It's choosing to implement in the interests of Albertans.

I'd ask that we pass this motion and let Members' Services get on with the job.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 11 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Acting Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Hale	Quadri
Barnes	Hancock	Quest
Bikman	Horner	Sandhu
Calahasen	Jeneroux	Sarich
Campbell	Johnson, L.	Saskiw
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Scott
Denis	Kubinec	Smith
Donovan	Lemke	Starke
Dorward	Leskiw	Stier
Fawcett	Luan	Towle
Fenske	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Forsyth	McAllister	Webber
Fox	McDonald	Wilson
Fritz	Oberle	Xiao
Goudreau	Olesen	Young
Griffiths	Pedersen	

Against the motion:

Anglin	Engen	Rowe
Bilous	Notley	Strankman
Blakeman		

Totals:	For – 47	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 11 carried]

5:00

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Olesen moved, seconded by Mr. Luan, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate May 28: Mr. Horner]

The Acting Speaker: We'll move on to the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is truly an honour to rise here in this Assembly today. I recognize, clearly, the great debate that has taken place here. In fact, I've seen it with my own eyes in the last couple of days. It's been very interesting for a newcomer, the passionate people that have stood and worked tirelessly before us. In fact, in my desk there is a signature of the Speaker dated August 30, 1993. Some have been here a while. I am humbled to be in a position to contribute to this process, and so it begins with a response to the Speech from the Throne. May I thank every member in here in advance for your undivided attention, which I know I will have for the next 10 or 15 minutes.

We have all just come through an election campaign, so we all know the value of support on the home front. I'd like to start there: my wife, Lisa, her unwavering support. I have three children: my son, Mitch, who graduates from Chestermere high school this week, and my daughters, Ally Grace and Morgan Faith. I am eternally grateful, clearly, for their support in the campaign that we have all just come through.

Back in August I took a giant risk and walked away from a very successful and rewarding career to take a run in the field of politics. Some said at the time: McAllister, you have lost your mind. In the last day or two I have thought that maybe they were right at times. But I did so because I want to effect positive change in this province, and I know that on that point we all agree. I want to stand up and effect more positive change in my community.

I also did it because I feel like the government has gone off course, and that is what I heard over and over again through the election campaign from the great people of Chestermere-Rocky View. I'd like to thank those people, too. More than 10,000 of those people humbled me by selecting me to be their provincial representative. I'm truly honoured by it.

We have a very diverse riding in Chestermere-Rocky View. It's diverse in many ways: ethnically, socially, geographically. You might think of it geographically as an upside-down U, I suppose, over the city of Calgary. On the east side is my hometown of Chestermere, 15,000 people. There were fewer than 5,000 people in the town of Chestermere 10 years ago, so that gives you an indication of how fast it has grown. In fact, the most recent Canadian census had Chestermere as the fifth fastest growing community in this country and the fastest growing community in this province.

With that kind of growth, of course, we are dealing with some very unique challenges. Keeping up with the necessary community amenities is tough, and I know we'd all recognize that in our

own ridings anyway. I hope to be able to provide support for that unprecedented growth: support for health services, support for schools, and support for rec facilities when we can. We have a beautiful lake community with wonderful, committed community people, a small army of people that do a lot in the town of Chestermere. I'm very proud to be from there.

Also on the east side of this riding is Langdon. It's another rapidly growing community, now more than 4,000 people. It is referred to as the good luck town. There is Conrich, Indus, Kathryn, Keoma, Delacour, Dalroy, Dalemead, and many farms and ranches in between. So far we're just on the east side of Chestermere-Rocky View.

Now, many of those people talked to me about property rights during the campaign, and I should say up front that I intend to stand up for them on this front. I know our party will lobby for property rights in Chestermere-Rocky View and throughout Alberta. In the throne speech, Madam Speaker, there was not one mention of this critical issue, and I know a lot of Albertans found that troubling.

I mentioned the east side of our riding. There is Balzac to the north of Calgary. There is Springbank, Bearspaw, Elbow Valley, Redwood Meadows, Cochrane Lake, the Tsuu T'ina First Nation on the west side. You will see some of the most natural beauty in this province in this riding. These are communities full of proud people who have found success through hard work and through entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneurial action. They talked to me at length at the doors and in community halls about fiscal responsibility. They asked me over and over again: in a province with this financial wealth, with an industry like the oil sands and the revenue that we take in, how is it that we can't go to the mirror and find a way to balance our books?

I share their concern. My parents taught me a pretty valuable lesson, and it seems pretty simple, actually, as well. I think we probably all know it, and we'd be wise to apply it in government: don't spend more than you take in; put money away into savings. I plan to push for these things because my constituents told me to. That's the most important part. I believe we can have the best services in this country and still balance the books. We do have to go to the mirror and remember that we are spending Albertans' money when we are spending money. It is not ours to do with as we choose. We have to spend it wisely, just as Albertans and you and I and everybody else in here have to do in our home.

Madam Speaker, my constituency is among the youngest, as well, in this province. Parents are very aware that educating our kids and providing the resources and the facilities to do so is a paramount responsibility of the provincial government. We talked about it some today in question period. We have to ensure that all of Alberta's children receive a world-class education, which will make them competitive in a world where quality education is becoming more and more significant. In partnership with the important core values taught by my parents, a proper education, we know, provides a launching point for healthy and contributing citizens. I should say all parents; I don't think it was just mine that taught me a few values.

We do know that the provincial government spends more per capita than any other province on education. The problem is that tens of millions of those dollars are wasted in an administrative and bureaucratic nightmare. We spend millions finding ways to burden the classroom teachers with additional paperwork, with record keeping, and other make-work projects. These are things that I heard from teachers and administrators themselves just in the last weeks in meetings in my own constituency.

I'd like to see more money go into the classroom, more money for more teachers and front-line staff in our children's schools.

That's what this party has talked about. This means flowing more funding directly to individual schools, where principals, teachers, and parents, we believe, know best where and how to spend it. Hiring more teachers was a centerpiece of our last Wildrose balanced budget alternative. We can move money away from other areas like the government's continued use of corporate welfare projects like carbon capture. Of course, we would like to see it better used by hiring more teachers, particularly on the front lines, and on support staff in the classroom also.

Madam Speaker, a central feature of Alberta's education system is that it provides parents with a greater range of educational choices, I think, than any other system in North America. Many of us in this room also choose different choices. Now, although strong public schools are critical to our education system, charter schools, private schools, and home-schools provide educational opportunities and teaching methods that are sometimes unavailable in our public system.

In fact, our public school boards have responded to competition from these schools by rolling out, I think, a diverse range of excellent options, some optional choices that are second to none in North America. This is why I'm a strong advocate of the public system. I am proud of Chestermere high school and the teachers and administrators. As I said, my son graduates there this week. My daughter Ally Grace is enrolled in kindergarten in the French immersion program at Prairie Waters elementary in Chestermere also. C'est bon to the program. They are terrific people and big supporters of that public system.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget the essential role that special-needs education should take in our education system. This is crucial. It's an area where the government, I think most would say or certainly as I heard on the campaign trail, is underperforming. There are thousands of children with special learning needs in our education system. The government has done a poor job of caring for them.

We do have a very good preschool program with regard to students with developmental disabilities. We should point that out, the good with the bad. But once you move on, once you get into the grade level after you get past kindergarten, it is underfunded in a lot of ways. This is something that we hope the government will work to alleviate in the next few years. Again, while we didn't get any indication that they would in the throne speech, I stand here and believe that they will and that we can work together on that.

We will, as is expected from the opposition, hold the government accountable on behalf of Albertans when we must. That said, I do look forward to working with government, with the members on the other side of this Assembly and on this side, to get more done for the province of Alberta. I believe we can work together.

Over the next four years, Madam Speaker, I plan to represent the people of Chestermere-Rocky View to the best of my abilities, which means listening to them, meeting with them, and advocating for the people that sent me here. It means remembering above all else that it is the people of our province, the people of our constituencies, that employ us. It is those people that sent us here to the Legislature on their behalf.

5:10

It is an honour – it really is a privilege – to stand up here before you today. I'm grateful for the opportunity. I started today by talking about family, and I would like to conclude my response to the Speech from the Throne by talking about the same thing. My mother, Joan, is in Medicine Hat. I come from blue-collar roots. My mother worked in the dietary and laundry facilities at the Medicine Hat regional hospital for years, raising three kids by herself for a long stretch. My father is a cow-calf farmer, and he

farms in the village of Gagetown, New Brunswick, still in his young 70s, mid-70s now. Anybody with anybody in farming knows that you can't make a man retire from farming. He'll do it until the very end.

They did teach me something, one or two things, growing up. One of the most important I'd like to speak of I think serves us all well, and that is to remain humble, which means that I don't believe it's our hockey jacket that defines us, I don't believe it's our job that defines us, I don't believe it's the vehicle we drive, our bank account, our title, or any of the above. I think at the end of the day, more than anything else, it's our actions that will define us.

Through that, Madam Speaker, may I say that we have healthy debating here, but I believe what unites us is stronger than what divides us, and I hope that we can apply that principle as we go forward. It's my hope that I stand here and sit here on a daily basis with great dignity for the residents of Chestermere-Rocky View as we all work toward a better and stronger Alberta.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I think it's important that we remember to laugh at ourselves once in a while. For instance, when the Member for Little Bow, Ian Donovan, shows up with one black sock and one blue sock on, I think we should laugh at that, even if it was my lame attempt at a joke to sort of let you know.

It is an honour and a privilege to be able to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for that lovely maiden speech.

We have Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any who would like to take advantage of 29(2)(a) at this time?

Seeing none, we'll move on to our next speaker, the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and it is with great pleasure that I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. It is a privilege to do this on behalf of the constituents of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank my husband, who has sat here for the last four hours and waited for this opportunity to listen.

I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for both his wonderful words and his commitment to this great province. I would also like to thank him for formally beginning this First Session of the 28th Legislature. Madam Speaker, His Honour's distinguished career as both a member of the Canadian armed forces and as a military adviser and volunteer with humanitarian causes should be looked upon with the utmost respect. I further commend his dedication as he continues to serve the people of Alberta.

I would like to extend thanks and gratitude to our hon. Premier. The past year has been incredibly demanding for her, and she has served in the office of Premier with integrity and an unwavering loyalty to the people of Alberta. Under her guidance Alberta continues to be a province with strong leadership, innovative solutions, and unlimited opportunity.

Madam Speaker, it gives me both pride and humility to have been elected by the constituents of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. The old Chinese proverb goes: may you live in interesting times. I think we do. This past election brought out an interest and passion in many people who had been indifferent and uninvolved for many years. It engaged many youth who decided that they want to have a say in shaping their future. I also have many friends in my

baby boomer generation who for the first time read up on the issues, asked the questions, and made their voices heard. My daughter is an engineer in Winnipeg, and it was interesting to hear that most of her colleagues followed our election and were very knowledgeable about our issues. People across this country were following the events here in Alberta. We saw Facebook and Twitter light up with questions and comments from all corners of this province. This relatively new way of communication enabled people to have easy access to the candidates and to ask questions and make comments.

The reason I sought the nomination for the Progressive Conservative Party, Madam Speaker, was to bring my knowledge of local governance and an experienced voice to this Assembly. The citizens of Alberta expect great things from this government and have entrusted us to do good work here to put into law and to practice what's important to them. We must be transparent and honest in all that we do, and we must keep Albertans engaged in what we are doing. We must use respect and decorum in our discussions and deliberations. I am confident that we will not let Albertans down.

Madam Speaker, this is our province, and this is our time to shine, our time to secure a good quality of life and prosperity for future generations, and as His Honour said in the Speech from the Throne, this begins by investing in families and communities.

Madam Speaker, education is an area that has always been very near and dear to me. I started out as a member of my children's school council because I wanted to be involved in their education. I was elected as a school trustee and spent a total of 18 years in that position, having spent three of those as the president of the Alberta School Boards Association.

As I travelled across this country in that capacity, I came home every time knowing that we have an excellent education system here in Alberta. We are seen as world leaders in this field, and I support the hon. Premier in further raising the bar. We will strive to further improve the education system and to keep up with the inevitable changes that will take place, but we can rest assured that our children are being well educated. As a grandmother I know I speak for many Albertans when I say that a strong education is critical to the future of Alberta. The future prosperity and progress of this province depends on our ability to educate our youth and give them as much opportunity as possible, and I am thankful that our Premier shares the same passion and vision in this area.

Madam Speaker, agriculture has also been a big part of my life. My husband and I have four children, including three sons who are proud farmers. They epitomize the enthusiasm of youth and bring it to this vital industry in our province, an industry that has been a significant part of Alberta's past and conjures up feelings of pride and heritage.

Last fall there was a succession planning seminar held in Westlock. There were about 250 people who attended, and the presenter was surprised when he asked the question to those in the room: who doesn't have a son or daughter with them? Only a few hands went up. There continues to be a strong presence in this province of young farmers whose families are involved in agriculture, young farmers who are well educated and enthusiastic about the future of agriculture in Alberta.

The face of farming has changed. It has become more complex, and there is a need to keep abreast of all of the changes in the industry. This government will ensure that we enable our food producers to continue to operate without undue interference and will support them during their time of need.

Madam Speaker, my Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency starts just north of Edmonton, near Morinville, and goes all the way up to Chisholm and Swan Hills. It is quite large and diverse. Parts of the area have some of the best farmland in Alberta, and there are vast tracts of forest in the resource-rich Swan Hills area. A large and growing number of my constituents commute either to Edmonton or Fort McMurray to work. We have several large towns, with innovative entrepreneurs who have developed successful industries and who sell their products around the world.

As the Lieutenant Governor stated in his Speech from the Throne, Alberta is already “the most economically free jurisdiction in North America.” Nowhere else are businesses so free to operate without undue interference or to adapt to market conditions. With a Premier so dedicated and passionate about allowing businesses to thrive, I am confident that I will see more of this business development and entrepreneurial energy in my constituency.

5:20

One of the issues in my riding, however, is the depopulation of our northern rural areas. Madam Speaker, our local school board is faced with declining enrolment in the area north of Westlock. Trying to keep our small schools viable is a challenging task. Our municipal governments spend a lot of money to ensure that the hamlets have good sewer and water systems, good streets, and fire protection. With our government’s commitment to building and maintaining many schools across this province, I am optimistic that we can keep our small schools open so that young families can stay in their communities. All of my constituents have the same need for good education, health care, seniors’ care, and infrastructure, areas that our province is fully committed to strengthening.

Madam Speaker, I know a man in Westlock who was born and raised in Nigeria, Africa. He tells me of his amazement at seeing what we have here in Alberta. The abundance of space and personal freedom is what impresses him the most. Sometimes those of us who have spent most of our lives here take these things for granted. It is at our peril that we do so. We must work hard to preserve our freedom and to always be good stewards of our natural resources. I agree with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor that we must develop these resources responsibly in order to protect our environment and grow our markets. We must be judicious with development and plan wisely. We must evaluate and monitor development to ensure that there will be prosperity and natural beauty for our grandchildren.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you how excited I am to be a part of this dynamic group of representatives, who will do the very best they can for the people of this province. We bring diversity and enthusiasm to this Assembly. We are of many faces and ethnicities, and we represent the diverse face of Alberta, a place I am so incredibly proud to call home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for that very passionate maiden speech.

We do have Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anybody would like to make use of it.

If not, we’ll move on to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you. Madam Speaker, hon. colleagues, Albertans, it is an honour to rise today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. On April 23 I had the privilege of being

elected to represent the people of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake in the Alberta Legislature. Like hundreds of thousands of Albertans, voters in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake voted for the Wildrose vision of a stronger, more confident Alberta, and I’m honoured by their faith and their confidence in me.

Last week we heard the government’s agenda for this legislative session in the Speech from the Throne. The journey Alberta has taken since its foundation is indeed remarkable, overcoming adversity and presenting thousands from across Canada and from around the world with a brighter future. The Speech from the Throne referenced how the government played a pivotal role in the development of our great province and that government would be the leader in moving our province forward. It ascribed to government the power to help Alberta and Albertans reach their full potential and conquer their challenges. Respectfully, I disagree.

Albertans know that it isn’t the government that leads Alberta forward. It’s the people, everyday Albertans across this great province, who are the real driving force behind our success. Albertans are a prosperous and entrepreneurial group of people. They look to their representatives to ensure their opportunity in this province. Albertans, whether born and bred or who come from other places, have an unstoppable spirit, a desire to create better lives for themselves and for their children, a passion to drive forward new ideas, new opportunities, and new freedoms for hard-working families, a need to overcome and conquer those obstacles which others have found immovable and enviable, and an unshakable faith that through honesty, integrity, and hard work our province will continue to cast down its detractors and naysayers.

I have always been proud to be an Albertan, and I’m honoured that my fellow Albertans gave me the privilege of representing them here in this Chamber. I did not have a lifelong dream to run for office. In fact, I hadn’t really ever considered it until my brother was forced into a long-term care facility because of an illness. In 2008 my 32-year-old brother, Ron, was diagnosed with a devastating illness that would take his life in less than three years. Huntington’s disease is a neurological disorder for which there is no treatment, no cure, only a horrific death.

During that time my brother Ron required admission to a long-term care centre, which at age 32 was a difficult development for my brother to take. I fought – and I fought hard – to get my brother the care he needed. I wrote 420 letters, I called politicians, whatever I could think of to get him a long-term care bed. Eventually I had to take my cause to the media, and on the eve of the 2008 federal election my brother received a long-term care bed.

This was a terrible and difficult time for my family. My brother Ron had no assets, he had no income, and he had no savings. As most of you are likely aware, long-term care is expensive and for many Albertans, including my brother Ron, impossible to afford. However, my brother Ron was fortunate that he had a family that fought for him, provided for him, and advocated for him. What about those who do not? It saddens me to think that there are those Albertans who do not have the support that my brother did and who are facing this difficult journey without adequate care.

We have thousands of dedicated medical professionals in Alberta, but the system in which they operate is broken, and patching over the widening cracks with more money and tinkering will not fix the problem. Albertans who need long-term care shouldn’t have to fight for it tooth and nail. People like my brother Ron, who are terminally ill, shouldn’t have to spend their last days fighting for adequate health care.

My family and I miss my brother dearly. Ron would have been amazed and proud to know a Member of the Legislative Assembly. He would have been honoured to know that because of him I have chosen to serve the public in the best way that I can. I am saddened that he is not here today to stand by me, to encourage me, guide me, and watch his sister rise and speak in the Legislature, but his journey is my inspiration to fight for a better health care system for all Albertans, and his legacy will be the day when Albertans are able to access the best health care in the world, that's available when they need it.

We needn't look too far to see what happens when a government fails in its responsibilities to serve in the best interests of its citizens. Our role in representing this wonderful province is to ensure that we have balanced budgets, keep spending under control, and not let the government be all things to all people. Alberta must remain a destination of choice for families and businesses.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to represent Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has many unique features. The rural landscape boasts some of Alberta's best agricultural land and many of Alberta's most productive farmers. Rural Alberta needs a strong voice in the Legislature because it is dying a slow death. Farmers, ranchers, and landowners are facing rising input costs, erosion of landowner rights, and ever-increasing power bills. Our rural electrification associations are being dismantled. Producers are not able to stay in business, and there is no encouragement of young farmers in this industry. Our role as public servants is to ensure that Albertans are looked after. We must ensure the success of our agricultural industry because if we have no producers, simply, we have no food.

The Innisfail-Sylvan Lake riding is like many ridings in this great province. The aging of the population is creating challenges to ensure healthy and safe living options. Many hard-working, aging Albertans are living within limited means and cannot afford to heat their homes, pay their utilities, and are too proud to become a burden on their families. This retiring generation has toiled the fields of Alberta to ensure that we have success in the province that we see today. Our aging population needs to be respected, to be allowed to have dignity and choice.

5:30

Innisfail, like many communities, is facing such a problem. Their lodge needs to be updated if not replaced. The community has needs that have exceeded the options available. I will be a strong voice to ensure that the needs of our aged are being met in this province.

Sylvan Lake, like many communities, has many similar needs. However, there are two main priorities for the residents of the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake riding. Sylvan Lake's beauty is encouraging Albertans and Canadians to visit and enjoy the bounty of the lake. The town of 12,800 people boasts a stunning and popular lake and swells to the population of a small city in the summer.

The first priority for Sylvan Lake is an urgent care centre. Its need is strongly supported by the community and local physicians. This would also enable surrounding areas such as your own riding, Red Deer-North, and Red Deer-South to relieve the ever-increasing demands on the Red Deer regional health centre.

The second priority is the review and opening of the highway 781 and highway 11 intersection. The residents of Sylvan Lake have spoken out about decisions being made by the current government with no public input. The closure of this intersection was one such example. I have met with the Minister of Transportation, and I'm looking forward to his assistance and co-operation with me on this issue.

It is my commitment to work with the government on behalf of the people I represent and to see that these projects are fulfilled. I will not rest until this happens.

On April 23 over 440,000 Albertans voted for a new hope and a better alternative. They voted for Danielle Smith and the Wildrose – oh, sorry; I'm not allowed to say that – a party with new ideas that will put Albertans first. Our approach is clear and simple: prudent spending, saving for the future, genuine health reforms, support for our everyday, hard-working families, protections for seniors, and true accountability for all Albertans.

Over the next four years Wildrose will be offering a real conservative alternative. We will offer new ideas to the failed policies of the past. We will listen to Albertans rather than telling them what they should be, what they should do, or what they should say. We will shed the light of the day on those practices and policies which the government would prefer to keep hidden. We will promote an Alberta which walks tall in the global corridors of power. We will reject the notion that we cannot improve our public health care system and stare down those who believe that long waiting lists and crowded emergency rooms are intractable problems.

Madam Speaker, we will do what we have pledged to do from the very beginning. We will do something remarkable. Wildrose will put Albertans first each and every day in every community across this province. My colleagues and I are excited about the role Albertans have given us for the next four years. We will take seriously our role of holding government accountable on behalf of all Albertans. We will demonstrate that we are a government in waiting led by a Premier in waiting, and we will show Albertans that with Wildrose their interests will always be put first.

Hon. members, I extend my congratulations to each and every one of you. I realize that the next few years will be a challenge, but it will be an exciting challenge. I look forward to the promise of a more open and transparent government, co-operation amongst all parties for the betterment of all Albertans, and ensuring that every riding is treated fairly. I look forward to working with each and every one of the members of this fine House to help strengthen our communities, bring dignity to our elected members, and show all Canadians what a beautiful and hard-working province Alberta truly is.

Lastly but not least, I would like to say thank you to my husband, Brad, and my family. Their unwavering support, dedication, and strong belief in my abilities make me work harder every single day for the riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I look forward to the next four years.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for a very passionate and touching speech. I'm very pleased to see that you caught yourself on using a formal name in the Legislature. We all have to remember that.

We do have Standing Order 29(2)(a).

We'll move on to our next speaker, and that is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to address the Assembly for the first time and to reply to the first Speech from the Throne of the 28th Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I'd like to pause at this time, as the hon. member did, and thank His Honour the Honourable Donald Ethell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, for his distinguished service to Canada and Alberta in both the Canadian armed forces and as a tireless adviser and volunteer in our communities.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to also congratulate you on your election. Thank you for your service.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'm mindful that at age 60 I'm one of the oldest new members here. Yet I cannot help but feel like a young child on Christmas morning. There are no words to express the feeling of joy that I am experiencing today. I would not be here at all except for the love and support of my wife, Janice, and my family. Janice is in the gallery today with my friends. Janice truly is a jewel in my life. My family are my touchstones.

My hope and prayer is that providence will guide me in my service here to do the things that are in the best interest of Alberta's families in all their many forms. When we consider a new piece of legislation, it is right and fitting that we ask ourselves: "Is this right for my family? Is it right for the families in my community?" I quote from the Speech from the Throne. "Albertans are looking to the future with new hope and confidence. They see a chance to build the best lives possible for themselves and their families, and they are ready to make the most of that opportunity." I share that confidence for my family and my province.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my neighbours in the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar. By working on my campaign and voting for me, they have honoured me by choosing me to represent them here. However, I am well aware that I received only a plurality of the vote and that I must earn the trust and respect of both those who voted for me and those who voted for the other fine candidates in my constituency. My goal is to serve all my constituents with honesty, integrity, and humility.

Edmonton-Gold Bar is special to me. I have lived virtually my entire life in southeast Edmonton. I was brought up there, raised a family there, built a business there, and will retire there. My community has been a central focus of my adult life.

Edmonton-Gold Bar includes in it the rich francophone culture of the Bonnie Doon area, with the U of A's Campus Saint-Jean, and the option of the young people in our area to attend King's University College. We have active community leagues engaged in good works in our neighbourhoods. The seniors in our area are active and busy people, many times finding themselves over at the South East Edmonton Seniors Association, SEESA.

The chance to work together with my friends as a basketball coach, as a Scout leader, the chance to serve God through my church, the chance to partner to build a community centre for our young people: these opportunities have impressed upon me the power of people working together towards a common goal and the satisfaction of achieving those goals together. Mostly, though, I'm grateful for knowing the people that I have served with in these endeavours. The people I now serve as their representative are my family, my friends, and my neighbours. Whatever other duties and responsibilities that may fall upon me, my paramount role is to bring their cares and concerns to this House. This I now pledge to do.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to being the representative of the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar, my modest hope is that my background as a certified management accountant, as a chartered accountant, as a graduate of the University of Alberta and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, as a businessperson and a community organizer, that those things can help me contribute to the good work of this institution. I look forward to working on government and legislative committees and helping to ensure that going forward we are truly serving the best interests of Albertans.

I dedicate myself to service while an MLA and invite all members to do likewise.

Mr. Speaker, in researching the maiden speeches of the many hon. members that have come to this House before me, I noticed that there was a scarcity of partisanship in their maiden speeches. I think many people come here to this House seeking to extol higher virtues in their first address to the House, knowing full well that there would be plenty of time later to mix it up with their political opponents.

5:40

However, democracy is about choices, and partisan democracy is about political choices. Recently our provincial electorate made a choice, and it took the country's breath away, quite frankly. The meaning of that choice will shape our province's future for years to come. To me the lesson of history in our recent election is clear. Those who seek office and look to the future retain the confidence of the people of this dynamic province.

As we heard from the throne speech, "the challenge of change demands a response. It requires leadership ready to strike the right balance between progressive and conservative thinking." I believe our government reflects that balanced thinking in its policies and governance. As the Lieutenant Governor so aptly recognized in his speech last week,

our western spirit and heritage and entrepreneurial energy have always served us well. The unique pride, self-reliance, and fiscal conservatism that have made this province such a special place to live are as strong as they have ever been.

Our recent election was about the nature of our province and its politics. It surprised some people. When the dust settled, we found out some things. We found out that our Premier is progressive, our government is progressive, and our province is progressive. Upon reflection, the election results should not have been such a shock to so many. The one person who did not seem at all shocked was our Premier. That may explain why she is our Premier, for I think that she knows who she is, what our team is all about, and knows that Alberta is a progressive province and that these roots run deep here.

Alberta was a leader during the progressive era in enacting women's suffrage, workers' compensation, creating the Alberta Wheat Pool, and gaining control of our natural resources. During this time Irene Parby of the UFA became the first female cabinet minister in Canada and was one of the five strong women, the Famous Five, who won the Persons Case, which was the historical base of gender equality in our country.

Mr. Speaker, in 1971 Premier Lougheed's government passed the Alberta Bill of Rights, increased the people's share of energy revenues, and built the roads and schools and hospitals needed by a growing province. The opposition said that the government spent too much and that it did not reflect the values of Albertans. In 1975 the electorate made their choice and sent that opposition to the ash heap of history.

Now we will, as the Speech from the Throne described, provide an accessible primary care system and give Albertans tools and guidance to take charge of their health, expand family care clinics, and expand the province's network of continuing care centres. This government is not driven to do things by a strident ideology but by the belief that this is what the people of Alberta want and that it's the right thing to do. Our challenge is to look to the future, to do the right things for our time, our place, and our people. Progressivism is to me, more than anything else, the political imperative to be forward thinking and to provide current solutions to current challenges.

Now, our province is diverse in many ways, including political thought. I'd prefer that as Members of the Legislative Assembly we welcome and accept that diversity, Mr. Speaker. Debate is healthy; division is not. My wish is that members of this House recognize that Alberta is that diverse and tolerant modern society. We have always been people who look to the future with hope and confidence. We are proud Canadians. This is the message our electorate sends in election after election. We can debate, we can disagree, but we should not go on looking to divide our province based upon a fundamental misconception of who we are.

Mr. Speaker, having sat in this House listening to the Speech from the Throne, it reminded me of my reason for coming to the House, to represent the values I believe I share with the majority of Albertans. I am a fiscal conservative and believe we should maintain our policy of low taxes and avoiding debt while building our savings when we can. I believe Alberta is a progressive society in that it affirms and promotes our diversity and respects our differences. Our social policy should be tolerant and respectful.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne spoke to the need to simplify regulatory burden so that business will thrive and continue to drive our prosperity. I'm excited to assist with those initiatives, and I will work to discuss them with the many stakeholders.

Only an accountant could get excited about results-based budgeting, and I am. I heard from many residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar regarding the need to exercise fiscal discipline in the government, and I will be happy to report to them that that will be happening.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to let this House know of some comments that I heard from the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar this spring. Firstly, they know that Alberta is a prosperous province, leading the nation in jobs in our economy and in our country, a province that has low taxes, great opportunity, and no debt.

Secondly, they love our environment. I pledge to consider the environment in all the decisions that I make in this House.

Thirdly, my constituents know that they have a first-class educational system and a first-class health care system, and to that end I'd like to recognize and thank all those teachers and health care workers that work in this great province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as much as I am proud of my province, I am first and foremost a Canadian. To have the opportunity to come here today to serve my country by being a member of this House fills me with awe. I suspect that feeling will never leave me. I look forward to working with all members of this Assembly in the months ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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