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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 8a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
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Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
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Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
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Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Hon. Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
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Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Government House Leader
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
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Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)
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Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
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Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
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Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
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Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
Official Opposition Whip
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Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
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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Bhardwaj	Quadri
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Donovan	Rogers
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Eggen	Sherman
Fenske	Smith
Goudreau	Starke
Hehr	Strankman
Jansen	Towle
Luan	Young
McDonald	Vacant
Olesen	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Quest
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Anderson
Casey
Dorward
Eggen
Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Allen
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Dorward
Fenske
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Notley
Saskiw
Wilson
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Pastoor
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DeLong	Luan
Fox	McAllister
Fraser	Notley
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Jablonski	Sarich
Jansen	Saskiw
Jeneroux	Swann
Johnson, L.	Wilson
Kang	Young
Kubinec	Vacant
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DeLong
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Calahasen
Dorward
Forsyth
Goudreau
Jablonski
Mason
Quest
Sherman
Smith

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Cao
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Bhardwaj	Olesen
Brown	Pastoor
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Fox	Sarich
Fritz	Starke
Goudreau	Strankman
Jeneroux	Swann
Kennedy-Glans	Webber
Luan	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Amery	McDonald
Bhardwaj	Notley
Casey	Pedersen
Hehr	Sandhu
Jansen	Saskiw
Jeneroux	Towle
Johnson, L.	Xiao
Kennedy-Glans	Young
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson
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Amery	Hehr
Anglin	Kang
Bilous	Pastoor
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DeLong	Sarich
Donovan	Starke
Fenske	Stier
Fraser	Webber
Fritz	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Anglin	Johnson, L.
Barnes	Kubinec
Bilous	Lemke
Blakeman	Leskiw
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Cao	Webber
Casey	Xiao
Fenske	Young
Fraser	Vacant
Hale	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, give us the strength to labour diligently, the wisdom to think clearly, the courage to speak thoughtfully, and the conviction to always act without prejudice. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce through you to all members of the Legislature 64 members from Kensington school along with teachers Jaelene McEwen, Kim Shanks, Becky Medwid, and Zinnia Lischuk. They are here today to watch the proceedings, and I hope that everyone behaves accordingly. Would you please rise and receive a warm welcome?

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada, on its second Advocis day at the Alberta Legislature. For more than 100 years Advocis members have provided financial advice to Albertans, delivering security and peace of mind. The Advocis representatives are joining us today in the members' and the public galleries, and I would now ask them to rise so that we may all join in giving them a warm welcome to the Alberta Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly two members of my legislative office staff. Some of you may know Elizabeth Day, my administrative assistant, as she has worked in this building for almost eight years with several ministers and several MLAs. Nelson Ching recently moved to Edmonton from Calgary to join my office as my special assistant after spending almost two years as a constituency assistant for the Member for Calgary-Greenway. I invite my colleagues to call Elizabeth or Nelson if they ever need anything from my office. I am blessed to have such a hard-working, dedicated support staff in my office, and I thank them for their efforts each and every day on behalf of Albertans. They're seated in members' gallery, and I ask that they please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a special pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you a large contingent from Lethbridge. We call them Team Lethbridge. This is a vibrant and exciting group of people representing advanced education, education in the business community, and many other organizations, 18 to be sure. They've come to Edmonton to meet with ministers and to talk to our

government both about some of the great things that are happening in Lethbridge and also about some of those unique challenges that we might face. I would like to ask all of the members of Team Lethbridge to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guests from the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. These 11 correctional officers are a small portion representing approximately 1,100 federal correctional officers employed in several federal prisons situated in Alberta. They are here today to request that their contributions to the public safety of Albertans be recognized by the members of this Assembly through Bill 1, which currently acknowledges police officers, firefighters, and EMTs but does not recognize correctional officers despite the fact that they are first responders. I would now like to ask my guests to rise as I call their names: Kyle Reynolds, Cheryl Reynolds, Janine Enskat, Sandra Krstic, Lacy Mitchell, James Rutledge, Kevin Ransome, Melissa Moher, Andrea Tait, David Baron, and Eryn Lindon. I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on your behalf to rise and introduce through you to the Assembly a constituent of yours sitting in your gallery, Irene Feika, who is a passionate advocate on behalf of citizens with disabilities. Irene has been a board member of PLAN Edmonton since 2007 as well as a past executive director of the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. With Irene today is her grandson Kody Griffiths. Kody is a grade 8 student attending Ottewell school in the Edmonton-Gold Bar area and loves phys ed and woodworking. I would now like to ask Kody to rise. Irene, please give us a hearty wave. We will acknowledge your attendance, and you will receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly eight very important people. Some are here for the first time and some for the second time. They actually come from Slave Lake and from the Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they stand as I introduce them: Mrs. Elsie Stenstrom, Mrs. Mary Brown, Mrs. Jean Potskin, Mrs. Maryann Courturielle, Miss Bernice Willier, and Mr. Adelard Beaver. Of course, they are driven here by their bus driver, Ms Elizabeth McSweyn, and their chaperone –these seniors need a chaperone? – Miss Inga Lanctot. I'd ask that my colleagues from this House please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona stole my thunder, but I'm going to continue as planned anyway. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Kyle Reynolds, with his wife, Cheryl. Kyle was a correctional officer at the Bowden Institution for many years until he developed posttraumatic stress disorder resulting from an incident he witnessed at his job in the prison. He is here along with a number of corrections officers

from across this province to represent a group of first responders that has been overlooked by Bill 1. Kyle along with other COs in attendance are here to support an amendment to Bill 1 that will be brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. I ask Kyle and his wife, Cheryl, and other correctional officers in the members' gallery to please rise and twice receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: I don't have anyone listed here for members' statements. I'm sure there are some, so perhaps we could start with the hon. member, the leader of the New Democratic opposition.

1:40 Food Safety Monitoring

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the middle of the largest beef recall in Canadian history this Premier assured Albertans that beef was safe to buy and serve to their families. This is one of the most irresponsible statements on food safety since Ralph Klein said that farmers with BSE-infected animals should shoot, shovel, and shut up. In a misguided attempt to protect the beef industry, this government risks perpetuating the very problems which undermine it. Only if Albertans, Canadians, and foreign customers can be assured of the safety of our beef will our brand remain strong. Ignoring the problem is the worst thing this government can do, yet that is exactly what it is doing.

By rejecting the NDP's call for a public enquiry, the Premier is undermining the very efforts to ensure that the problems with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and their monitoring systems of Alberta beef will be corrected. Despite an investigation recommendation after the tragic listeriosis crisis of 2008 the CFIA was to conduct an audit of their resources, and that has never been fully completed. The federal Conservatives' budget includes cuts to the CFIA of \$56 million a year by 2015, yet this Premier again refuses to stand up for the protection of consumers and for the health and sustainability of our beef industry by not opposing these federal cuts.

Attempts by the Premier, her agriculture minister, and even the Leader of the Official Opposition to trivialize the threat of E coli are unacceptable. E coli can be deadly, and there have been many outbreaks in Canada and around the world that have cost many people their lives. For this reason, we place an emphasis on preventing contaminated meat from reaching grocery stores and your family's kitchen table.

This government has not only failed to protect the health and safety of Alberta families, but they continue to neglect the beef industry, which employs thousands of people in our province. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better.

The Speaker: Thank you for your patience, hon. members. Unfortunately, I had a page out of order in my script here. I do have the list here. I should have recognized the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek first, so I extend my apologies to you for the error. I recognize you now.

Primary Care Networks

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose caucus supports primary care networks. I'd like to talk about the valuable work that is being done by doctors across our province under the primary care network model. Over 2,600 physicians have formed collaboration teams with other health care providers to increase access and the quality of care for Albertans. Doctors, nurses,

dietitians, mental health workers, and many other health care providers work side by side, bringing comprehensive care to over 2.9 million Albertans.

This summer we saw the Auditor General's report on primary care networks, where he pointed out, "We found that various PCNs have developed a number of performance measures to manage the delivery of their individual clinical programs, but AHS does not compile or assess this information on an overall basis." He goes further to say that primary health care is one of the top five strategies in the five-year action plan, yet "the provincial primary healthcare plan has not yet been developed." It is extraordinary when you think about what the Auditor General is saying. A government that is supposed to lead isn't actually leading or, for that matter, doing what they said that they would be doing.

Mr. Speaker, the PCNs are a valuable asset to our health care system. We need to support what they are doing and allow them to brag about what they are accomplishing for their customers, their patients.

This government likes to brag about all the good things that they were doing, but let's give credit where credit is really due, to our health care professionals, who know how the system works. They know how to fix it. We need to allow them to do what they do best, and that is to take care of Albertans the way Albertans expect them to.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'm sure there are members across the way who were having a conversation who would wish to not continue doing so. Whoever has the floor has the right to be heard. Let's please respect that as best we can.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Child Abuse Awareness Month

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October is national Child Abuse Awareness Month. It's a time to learn more about how Albertans can work together to stop abuse from happening by supporting parents and families to become stronger. As a social worker myself I had the pleasure of working in the field of child protection during the early years of my career. You can rest assured that this is a subject that is very close to my heart.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is a community responsibility. It depends on family members, neighbours, teachers, health professionals, and anyone involved in a child's life to provide help when they can or report any concerns they may have about a family which is struggling.

Every day concerned Albertans act on this responsibility, and they call the confidential child abuse hotline. Mr. Speaker, each of these calls has been critical in ensuring that families are receiving help to keep their children safe. Some of those calls have kept families together by linking them with supports in their communities. I encourage all Albertans to call the confidential child abuse hotline to report any concerns they may have about a child or family. Anyone who thinks a child or family may need help to prevent abuse or neglect can call 1.800.387.KIDS.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we can create safer and stronger communities by us working together like this.

Thank you very much.

Canonization of Kateri Tekakwitha

Ms Calahasen: The song *Only the Good Die Young* is fitting for the Lily of the Mohawks, Kateri Tekakwitha, who died at a young

age. She is the first North American Indian to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, which occurred on October 21, 2012, after years of lobbying by many, many people.

Kateri was born in 1656 to a Mohawk chief and an Algonquin mother at the village of Ossernenon near New York. At the age of four smallpox attacked her village, taking the lives of her parents and baby brother. Although she survived the epidemic, she was left an orphan, weak, scarred, and partially blind. She was adopted by her aunt and uncle and grew up living a traditional life of picking roots, preparing medicines and dyes, collecting firewood, and tending to cornfields. She was never formally educated and was never able to read or write in any language. She, however, loved nature and often went into the woods to speak with God.

At the age of 18 a Jesuit missionary came to the village, and although her uncle disliked the Black Robes and this strange new religion, he allowed her to receive religious instruction. Kateri found her calling, loving Jesus and his teachings. She was eventually baptized and given the name "Kateri," little knowing the ramifications of her Christianity. She became the village outcast. She was refused food on Sundays because she refused to work. She was taunted and threatened with torture or death if she did not renounce her religion. This increasing hostility made her run away, and months later she ended up at St. Francis Xavier near Montreal.

Although she died far too young, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha's life is still an inspiration to many. I am proud the trustees of Grande Prairie Catholic schools renamed Kateri mission school to St. Kateri Catholic school in honour of St. Kateri, very fitting as their focus is on reading strategies and interventions for students. What an honour.

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

Ken Stewart

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a privilege for me to be appointed the Deputy Chair of Committees, or, in other words, the third Speaker of the House. When it came time for me to be outfitted with the parliamentary garb of a Speaker, I was directed to a men's clothing shop in downtown Edmonton that specialized in this type of clothing. In this magical little shop known as Stewart's Men's Wear I discovered this wise old wizard, who was able to measure me up, with his tape measure of course, and order the correct size of pants, shirts, and robe within minutes.

What is magical is Mr. Ken Stewart himself, who is 85 years old and has worked in this clothing business for 68 years. I've never met anyone before who has worked in any business for 68 years. It takes a very special person to serve judges, lawyers, clerks, and parliamentarians for over 68 years.

It's my honour to pay tribute to this incredibly hard-working Albertan, who is up at 5 a.m. every day, exercises for an hour, and is at work by 8:30. Ken Stewart goes above and beyond the call of service. He even walked out to the street that I was parked on to personally hand me my clothing so that I could hurry back and be here as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Ken Stewart is an extraordinary and hard-working Albertan, who is so humble that he was unable to come today to personally receive our thanks and appreciation for the outstanding work he has done for over 68 years to ensure that judges, lawyers, clerks, parliamentarians, and Speakers look their very best in their judicial garb. Thank you, Ken, for your extraordinary service to our community, and may you continue to serve for as long as your heart and health allow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MLA Remuneration

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need clarity on the government's next cash grab for MLA pay increases. As you know, the Wildrose has opposed the increase, but we see evidence in public statements and public actions that the PCs want the taxpayers to fund all of their RRSP contributions, another \$1,000 per month. Yesterday the Premier denied being involved in the effort, yet her government whip said that he misunderstood the directions he got from the Premier. Which is it? Does the Premier want to grab another \$1,000 a month from taxpayers or not?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I too have been listening to some of the comments in the press, and I think it's a bit disingenuous of the Leader of the Opposition to talk about MLAs in that committee voting for a pay raise when, indeed, if you take away the transition allowance, it's actually a substantial cut to MLA compensation in the province of Alberta, which we actually have been supporting, including reducing what came from the Major report. As you so eloquently put it yesterday, Mr. Speaker, this is a committee of the Legislature, a committee of all MLAs, and it should be more appropriately dealt with in that committee.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not talking about the committee. I am talking about the Premier's public statements made in the media, which are about as clear as mud about what the government's real intentions are. We think that they want to increase by \$1,000 per month, put this in place as a replacement for the no-meet committee money. Will the Premier assure us, as she did with the transition allowance, that this \$1,000-a-month idea will be killed?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, this is a committee of the Legislature, not a government committee.

The other thing that I think is a bit disingenuous, again, is the hon. Leader of the Opposition talking about what the committee might or might not be doing and then attributing it to the government. This is a committee of the Legislature of Alberta. For a party that touts itself as being extremely democratic and protecting that, you would think they would protect the honour of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm on that committee. I was at that meeting, and it did pass. Perhaps the hon. member would like to check the transcript.

Since we can't get a promise that they will scrub this 8 per cent increase in MLA pay, can the Premier explain how they can possibly enter into public-sector wage negotiations with that 8 per cent pay increase for MLAs out there?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a member of that committee I'm sure the hon. member is well aware that what is being proposed, as I understand it, not being a member of the committee, and what is being offered in the Legislature would be a substantial cut to the overall MLA compensation. It would be a lie to try to present it in any other way. I would suggest that that's perhaps what is going on outside of this House. The ongoing negotiations that we have with the public sector: we've been very

clear – at least I’ve been very clear in my position – where we’re going in the future on that. I’m sure it will be unfolded in the fullness of time.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for her second main set of questions.

Health Services Expense Reporting

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This isn’t the only example of how the PC government completely disregards taxpayer dollars that we saw over the summer. It began with Merali’s \$350,000 spending spree in Capital health. It continued through the Premier’s million-dollar Olympic junket to London and then on to Evan Berger’s \$120,000 patronage plum. Merali at AHS was bad enough, but the PCs actually offered him a job first to watch over the expenses of all government. Who was responsible for this sloppy bit of hiring?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we did not hire him, so let’s be clear about that. The interview was done. There was an offer made. Mr. Merali did not accept that offer. I would suggest to you that the hon. member has brought up a previous member of this House being employed by this government. It’s interesting that there are five previous candidates in the election being employed by that party across the way.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a cautionary note about invoking names of people who are not able to be here to defend themselves.

Second question, please.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government’s buddy-buddy hiring system brought Merali back into the government family and given that they are refusing to reveal all of the expenses incurred by all of the senior people in the health administration, who else in the government family are they trying to protect?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, obviously a politically staged question for the stunt. But, again, I’ll go back. The hon. members yesterday talked about the fact that they believe that hiring previous candidates in elections is somehow a bad thing, yet, as I said, their party has done exactly the same thing because they do see the value in people who are willing to put their names forward for election in this province and who have a passion for this province, as do we.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans simply want the truth.

Let’s go back to the issue at hand. The issue at hand is the release of all of the government expenses for those who are in senior positions at the health regions. Why won’t the government just agree to release all of the expense claims so that Albertans can have all of the truth about the health expenses of senior officials?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the information pertaining to travel and expense claims of any executive member of any of the current or former health regions is entirely available to Albertans through the freedom of information and protection of privacy process. With respect to current members of the senior executive of Alberta Health Services members should know that at the request of those individuals their expenses have been released or are about to be released, and the board of Alberta Health Services has asked for an independent audit of those expenses to confirm if they were in accordance with the policies in place at the time.

Ms Smith: I seem to recall the board chair complaining about the cost of FOIP expenses.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Ms Smith: In any case, Mr. Speaker, energy prices remain low, yet this government has made no effort to adjust its spending to reflect this new, harsh reality. Regular Albertans, the people we talk to, are worried about the swelling deficit, yet the Minister of Finance said here yesterday that captains of industry are “very confident” as he prepares for his next huge budget deficit. Today EnCana reported a third-quarter loss of \$1.2 billion, mainly due to lower natural gas prices. How big is the loss that the Alberta government is going to report?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows or should know given the amount of time she’s now had in the House, we will be doing our second-quarter update at the end of November. We’ve already done our first-quarter update. I don’t think I need to go back over that again because it’s very public. I will say again what I said yesterday: we will balance the budget, including funding our capital plan. We’re going to bring forward a vision and a plan for this province that the other members obviously could not because they’re not in government.

Ms Smith: That’s not what he said.

Given that the minister has gone so far as to speculate about a new mortgage and given that the world watched in awe as Premier Klein paid off the last provincial mortgage – there was even a celebration over that – to the Finance minister: when did Albertans give him permission to take out a new mortgage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, given that the Finance critic couldn’t read the financial statements of the province of Alberta, it’s understandable that the Leader of the Official Opposition cannot as well. We have the lowest personal taxes in Canada. We have no net debt. We have net assets in this province. We have savings. We have a sustainability account. We have the best financial picture of any province in Canada. We will build the infrastructure that Albertans want like highway 63 now, when they need it, not in the future and not defer it to when it’s going to cost more and when other people may have been injured.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to imagine that borrowing for roads and schools is the equivalent of a household mortgage. Of course, if things get tough in your household mortgage, you can always sell and downsize. What provincial assets does the minister have in mind to sell if things get tough here?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if my budget is balanced on a monthly basis and I’m making my mortgage payments, I’m not selling anything. I’m actually operating the way I should operate, the way every household in this province operates, and, in fact, the way every business in this province operates. It’s time they learned that.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Provincial Budget

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government projected a \$3 billion deficit despite oil at \$90 a barrel. With \$41 billion in expenses income taxes only account for about \$12 billion in revenue while \$11 billion in resource revenue

is being spent as fast as it is sucked out of the ground. We have a revenue problem, and the Liberal fair tax plan solves this. We'd balance the budget. We'd still be the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country. To the Minister of Finance: why does your government insist on tying our social services and children's education to the price of a barrel of oil?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have not. We have provided stable and predictable funding to those social services and to education and to health care. We have provided for the best possible health and education programs in our province. I would have to say . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. Let's try and have some civility and decorum continue here.

Hon. President of Treasury Board, please continue.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's pretty understandable that the reason the party that is now asking the question moved from there to there is because they advocated for raising Albertans' taxes and taking more money out of their pockets than they should. We're not going to do that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, stable, predictable underfunding is more like it.

Given that this government is unwilling to show leadership in addressing our revenue problem, would rather waste taxpayers' money on jet-setting across the world, adding more PR staff, and voting themselves hefty pay raises, to the Minister of Finance: after six consecutive deficits how do you propose to balance the books, or do you just plan to change the definition of a balanced budget?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the plan for balancing the books will be released in the budget that's going to be coming forward into this Legislature next spring. As I've said before and I'll say again, we will have a balanced operating plan, a balanced capital plan. We're going to actually talk about savings because that's what Albertans have told us to talk about. We're going to talk about putting forward a business plan. I know you folks over there probably wouldn't understand that part, but we're going to put forward a business plan that Albertans will understand and that will be related to what they do on a daily basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Liberal opposition leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund was set up to save nonrenewable resource revenue for future generations and today it's worth less than what it was a quarter century ago and given that the Minister of Finance and his associate minister are conducting a dollars and nonsense tour, begging Albertans to let them use their life savings to pay the daily bills, to the Minister of Finance: is your plan simply to raid the heritage savings trust fund in order to finance the PC's unbudgeted election promises?

Mr. Horner: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I will not and this government will not apologize for going out and talking to Albertans about their money and their savings. And I recognize that even though we did offer the invitation to the members opposite to attend a lot of these open houses, we didn't see any of them there. Obviously, we're listening; they're making it up.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democratic opposition.

Resource Revenue Projections

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When this government introduced the budget before the election, they projected oil at \$99 a barrel, but in January Shell warned that oil could be as low as \$70 a barrel. Other forecasters projected prices between \$75 and \$80 a barrel. Given that industry experts projected prices far lower than this Conservative government did, will the Finance minister admit that the government's budget is based on reckless and unrealistic expectations?

Mr. Horner: Well, it's an interesting rewrite of history, but unfortunately it's not true. The national forecasting agencies which we used are the Conference Board of Canada, IHS Global, the Centre for Spatial Economics, BMO Capital Markets, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank – and I could go on, Mr. Speaker – CIBC World Markets, J.P. Morgan, National Bank Financial, Peters & Co., RBC, Scotiabank, Toronto-Dominion, for all of whom, including independent analysts from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the range was \$91 to \$120. We went to the middle and down one notch. That's the estimate we used.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the price of oil today is now \$13 a barrel lower than the government's estimate, how can the government pretend to be surprised when this projected deficit has ballooned from \$868 million to \$3 billion?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't surprised at all. I'm the one that delivered the message.

It's obvious to me that members opposite seem to think that the price of oil is set at the beginning of the year and stays there for the rest of the year. We know better, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're talking about a range, and that's why we're talking about actuals to budget. We're not talking about rewriting the budget every three months, which I know is something that gives them something to talk about. The reality is that last year at this time we were projecting a deficit. Do you know what happened? We were \$23 million away from a balanced budget at the end of the fiscal year that finished in March. So to suggest that I or they could actually predict what the price of oil is is utter nonsense.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Finance minister come clean and admit that this government deliberately overestimated revenue in the last budget in order to hide the deficit reality from Albertans during the election?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've tried to indicate and as the documents prove, we don't make up the estimate. We use the estimates from these public and private estimators that are at that point in time. What we do know is that they are variable.

I would ask that the hon. member help us with the market access piece, which is so critical for us to attain the appropriate price for our product, that Albertans are now being hosed for because we don't have market access. We need that market access to get us back to a number that is more reasonable for our projections.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

School Construction

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we'll let the Finance minister sit down and grab a drink for a quick second and switch to education.

Yesterday a government MLA stood in this House and practically begged the Education minister to build a school in his riding. I think it's safe to say that 87 of us in here could do the same thing. The current approach to building schools is creating confusion and uncertainty for everybody as they wait on pins and needles to see if schools will be approved in their riding. To the minister: how are these decisions prioritized? Is there an established criteria that you follow to determine who gets new or renovated schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's a great question. It's on the mind of many Albertans. I would just say that this government is committed to building schools and building infrastructure. There probably are 87 MLAs that would ask that question in this House. I'm not sure how that reconciles with the opposition promise to cut \$1.7 billion out of the budget. These are not easy decisions to make. We take the requests we get from every school division across the province, and we measure those against each other in terms of which are the biggest health and safety issues, which are the biggest issues in terms of enrolment growth, and where don't we have desks. We're looking for partnerships, like I explained yesterday.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I always find it interesting when government refers to cuts because I think we talked about a bureaucracy being shaved. We didn't say anything about schools.

Given that so many boards and parents, Mr. Speaker, are in the dark about plans for schools in their area, given that there have been accusations of politics determining a role in where these new schools are going to be built, wouldn't it be prudent, then, for the minister to commit to creating and releasing a set criteria on how these decisions are made for building and renovating schools so we all know what's going on?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, just for clarity for the member his party's policy was to cut \$1.7 billion out of capital in this last election, and the year before that the alternative budget was to cut \$2.4 billion out of capital.

With respect to the question on the priorities of the... [interjection] Mr. Speaker, it seems the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre doesn't want to listen to the answer.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order? Thank you. It's been noted.

Hon. member, your final question.

Mr. McAllister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Trust me when I say that I'll try and proceed with some civility as we go through it.

Given that we are now staring a \$3 billion deficit in the face regardless of how it's sliced on the other side, given that during the election campaign the government made a promise to Albertans to build 50 schools and renovate 70 more, and given that it made a prior promise to build and renovate 33 more, will the minister stand up today, go on record, tell Albertans that they will build and they will renovate all the schools that they promised they would in the time frame that they said they would?

2:10

Mr. J. Johnson: Absolutely. We've got a promise from our Premier that we're going to open 50 schools and renovate 70 more within this term, Mr. Speaker, and we're working on a capital list right now that's going to deliver exactly that. I can tell you that in

addition to that, we will open 15 new schools this school year. We just opened 13; there are two more to come. The Minister of Infrastructure would tell you that there are 22 new schools under way right now and 13 other modernizations. There is a significant amount of capital being invested into schools. We realize that it's not enough, and our Premier realizes that it's not enough, and we're going to invest in families and communities just like she said we would.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Bullying Awareness and Prevention

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bullying continues to be a topic of great discussion with the tragic events of the last few weeks in our country. It is safe to say that everyone in this House agrees that this is not a new challenge. The most significant part of a child's day is spent in school, which increases the likelihood that a child can be bullied at school. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Can the minister tell the House what his department is doing now to ensure that Alberta children can feel safe at school?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Let me be very clear that bullying is unacceptable. Period. This is a very diverse province. We want the schools to respect diversity. Every child is unique, and every child deserves to feel safe, accepted, respected, with no exceptions. School boards and teachers across the province are doing some very great work in this regard and, without getting into the new Education Act because that would be out of order, we're going to even strengthen the expectations on school boards to that end.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: Mr. Minister, what resources are available for kids who are being bullied and are afraid to share their story or for parents that are concerned that their children are either being bullied or may be the bully?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, these are very difficult situations to be in, and I'm very happy to say that in partnership with my colleagues the Minister of Human Services and the Minister of Health there are a number of resources that are out there today. Like I said, the school boards and trustees and our great educators and the great people that work in my ministry on this are working very hard as well. We do have a 24-hour hotline for students and parents. There are also three different websites that various folks can go to for support, whether they're parents, students, or educators. We have a number of resources that are available for teachers and other initiatives that are ongoing throughout the year that are diverse across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: Mr. Minister, what is contained in today's curriculum that helps our children to develop these skills?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that curriculum and assessment revisions are being developed in response to Inspiring Education and the three Es. The central pillar of the three Es was the ethical citizen and, with respect to that, the expectations of the ethical citizen as one who contributes to the

community, one who respects diversity, is collaborative, and works with others. We want someone who earns what they get.

I just came from the Me to We big conference down in Calgary, and I can tell you that there are some exceptional initiatives that are ongoing in this province that are demonstrating the citizenship that our students are learning.

One we should profile is Mackenzie Martin, one of our pages, who rented the Winspear Centre a couple of weeks ago and put on an incredible conference that was profiling the International Day of the Girl Child. She deserves a lot of credit for that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Little Bow Continuing Care Centre

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose believes in putting Albertans first and following through on our commitments. Unfortunately, the government does not share these values. On page 8 of the government's election platform it clearly states in its continuing care strategy, and I quote: enhances the care capacity of every long-term and continuing care centre in Alberta, whether they are newly built facilities or renovations and upgrades to existing ones. End quote. To the Premier: how can Albertans believe a word you say when only three months after the election you broke a clearly defined campaign promise by shutting down the Little Bow continuing care centre in Carmangay?

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's the custom to table documents that you're quoting from, so I ask you to consider that.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for making that request.

This government has not failed to deliver on its commitment to Albertans with respect to continuing care. As was asked and answered in the House yesterday, Alberta Health Services made a decision regarding a particular continuing care facility in Carmangay, one of the oldest facilities in the province. Mr. Speaker, we discussed yesterday in the House the reasons that led to their decision.

The fact of the matter is that in the last year alone over 120 net new continuing care beds have been opened in the south zone of Alberta. As hon. members should also know, the new beds that we are building today are capable of delivering all levels of care to Albertans, including long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government's campaign platform clearly states a promise to build 1,000, and I quote, long-term care spaces, end quote, does the Minister of Health accept the AHS definition of long-term care as around-the-clock, 24-hour, registered nursing care?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've said many times before in this House, including before the election of the hon. member, we are committed to delivering a thousand beds a year. If any member of the House cares to take a look around the province, they will see that the new beds that are being developed are equipped to handle all levels of care from supportive living up to and including long-term care. [interjections] This supports aging in place. . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt, but again, interjections are not on. [interjections] Excuse me. No interruptions, including when I'm speaking, please, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Please. The point is that the Minister of Health has the floor. When you have the floor, I'll do the same for you.

Please proceed, hon. Minister of Health.

Little Bow Continuing Care Centre (continued)

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I think the critical difference between us is that this government is committed strongly to a principle of supporting aging in place for all Albertans. That means keeping couples together, that means not forcing people to move facilities when their care needs change, and that means supporting families and communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier was enjoying an all-expense-paid trip to the London Olympics while the Health minister was busy closing down the Little Bow continuing care centre, does the Premier find it acceptable that she could have kept her word, that she could have kept this facility open, and that she could have kept families together in Carmangay all for the cost of her luxury Olympic retreat?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, other than commenting on the disrespectful nature of the question and the fact that the Premier is not in the House today and that the question doesn't concern public policy in the remotest respect, I'd say to the hon. member once again that this government is committed to supporting modern approaches to continuing care for seniors that allow them to age in place and stay together in their own communities.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a reminder. Procedurally speaking, we do not, out of custom and tradition, refer to the absence of any members from this House.

Let us move on. Edmonton-South West followed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

School Construction (continued)

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overcrowding in schools has become a pervasive issue in this province. In some cases, like in my constituency of Edmonton-South West, schools have had to request portables in order to deal with this issue. Johnny Bright school, for example, has a current capacity of 850 kids but has close to 1,000 kids in the school. Could the Minister of Education please indicate whether school overcrowding is a priority issue to be addressed at this time?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think I've spoken to that already today, but the answer again is: absolutely. We know that there are some significant growth pressures in certain areas, especially in the large metro areas around the perimeter, or in the south by Okotoks and Airdrie, in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie. Those things are no secret, but they're going to be addressed in one of three ways. We not only have the option to build new schools, but we've got to use the modulars and the portable fleet that we have

as much as possible and invest in that. The other unique thing that we have a challenge with is that we actually do have a surplus of space in some of the metro areas, like Edmonton with an extra 50,000 spaces. They're just in the wrong spots.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance. There's been a lot of discussion about new schools, but could the minister please be more clear and indicate how the government plans to fund and build these new schools?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier in some of my responses to the hon. members opposite, we were talking to Albertans throughout the summer about how we might be able to approach capital in different ways and looking at alternative solutions, P3s and a number of other things that we've been doing. There are other methods of financing and getting value for that capital. We're going to take whatever approach we can to fit the needs. Albertans are asking us to build that infrastructure. We're not not going to build it now because they need it now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To really spread out my questions, could the Minister of Infrastructure please advise as to which specific communities and districts will be receiving these new schools?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education stated earlier today, he and I work closely to review the capital requests of all the school boards in the province and with the parents and families to come up with a priority list. I can assure you that growth pressures will be taken into account when we do that. We hope to be able to announce where and when the next school projects will be built over the next several months.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, despite projected growth in our schools doubling, Alberta classrooms have approximately 600 fewer teachers today than they did two years ago. Class sizes continue to rise, and teachers' working conditions continue to spiral downward. The government accepted a Learning Commission report in 2002 which committed to reducing classroom sizes, yet little has been done in this regard. To the Minister of Education: has the government simply given up on the recommendations of the Learning Commission report from approximately a decade ago?

Mr. J. Johnson: No, absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. The class size initiative is ongoing. It's still one of the envelopes that we use to fund schools. As a matter of fact, since . . .

Mr. Mason: But you're not reducing class sizes.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, it has had some success, but we're actually focusing our attention on the earlier grades, the primary grades, 1 to 3, and trying to have the most impact there.

We've actually invested \$1.6 billion in class size reduction since that report came out. I think that last year alone it was close to a quarter of a billion dollars. As a matter of fact, over the last 10 years – the hon. member talks about the last couple of years – the number of teachers in our school system has gone up 13 per cent.

Mr. Hehr: And it's made no difference on class sizes. They're still out of whack from what the Learning Commission recommendations were.

Given that teachers across the province have identified heavy workloads and increasing classroom sizes, two of the most detrimental factors to our children's education, will this government commit to reducing class sizes and ensuring optimal teaching environments?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to invest in and continue to work on the class size initiative. Absolutely. But there are other factors also at play in terms of how effective those classes are, including the skill of the teacher, and probably more impactful is the makeup of that class. With the inclusive education system we have now and the different types of students that they have in that room that the teacher has to work with, those are big challenges as well, and we need to try and face those at the same time as we deal with just the class size.

Mr. Hehr: Given that when the hon. Premier was running to become the leader of this great province, she promised full-day kindergarten within one year of taking office and that has clearly not happened, what are your plans to get this done in the next four years?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question, and many Albertans are asking this. We are committed to full-day kindergarten. There's no question about that. Right now being led by the Minister of Human Services is a review of early childhood development as a strategy. Prekindergarten, preschool, and kindergarten are part of that early childhood development strategy. So as that's concluded this year and we further study the requirements for funding for not only capital but the professionals that are needed for full-day kindergarten, we will be moving to full-day kindergarten options across the province.

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

Bill 44 Parental Rights Clause

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Conservative government likes to talk about antibullying, but there still lurks in this Chamber and around Alberta a bill that casts a dark and nasty shadow over their best intentions. Section 11 of Bill 44 puts a chill on good teaching practices, puts up walls, and discourages discussion on important issues. My questions are all to the Minister of Education. Will this minister not admit that this contentious section of Bill 44, section 11, undermines his attempt to build an effective antibullying and human rights education strategy?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that bill does not fall under the purview of Education, but I'm happy to comment on maybe any implications that may or may not have been felt in the education system over the last four years since the bill was passed. To my knowledge and from what I'm hearing from my ministry, there have been no negative implications, and we don't have cases of a chill in the classroom or complaints that have come forward through my ministry.

Mr. Eggen: Teachers around the province would beg to differ, Mr. Speaker.

Given limitations imposed by Bill 44 that make it much more difficult to discuss and teach important lessons on equality, diversity, and the acceptance of differences, how can the members of this Conservative caucus stand and debate in good conscience antibullying legislation when teachers are no longer able to address these issues without Bill 44 breathing down their necks?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is alleging that teachers are being bullied, I would like to know about that. I want to know about those cases. You should be phoning my office so that we can deal with it. Those are not cases that have been coming through the ministry. Let's not forget the rights of the parents, who do have a right to choice with respect to education, and that's a foundational piece of our education system.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that Bill 44 seeks to limit discussion on important issues about discrimination, gender, sexuality, why won't this minister use his influence to help rescind this bully Bill 44 section so that we can get on with the business of promoting equality, acceptance, and open discussion in our schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that we need to get on with it. We need to look forward. We need to deal with the Education Act. Let's not look back to a bill that was debated thoroughly in the House four years ago and passed. We have not been seeing negative implications of that bill.

Highway Safety

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for answering the Wildrose call for a timeline on the twinning of highway 63. However, highway 63 is not the only priority in the north. Wildrose heard time and time again on our consultation tour that highway 881 is also in need of urgent attention as it faces many of the same stresses as highway 63. Many residents in the area are calling for the upgrading of highway 881 to a primary designation. Has the Minister of Transportation done a cost-benefit analysis? Where is this on your priority list?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. The fact is, interestingly enough, that the opposition party put a request out last week which actually had a schedule slower than what this government has committed to. Further, after their asking for three years' capital spending to be spread out to four, it never would have been built had they been in control of things. Having said that, at the same time that we committed to keep the promise we've kept, we have also actually committed to adding some passing lanes on highway 881 and other things to make it safer. This government is performing on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that so far the government's progress on twinning highway 63 is incredibly behind schedule – it was in 2006 – will the Minister of Transportation commit to a detailed plan for twinning highway 63, including stages, including timelines, so Albertans will really know that this is a top priority for this government?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows and by now almost every Albertan knows, the highway will be fully twinned and opened by the end of fall 2016. Now, along the way there will be different stages which will become public as the tenders are let and received because that's part of the process. I'm sure the hon. member will be happy to be a part of that process as a member of

this House and as an Albertan, and we will make those things public as they become firm. Like all Albertans that appreciate the commitment by this Premier to get this done, I'm sure the hon. member appreciates that commitment as well.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that so many senseless deaths on highway 63 have occurred as Albertans have waited for this highway to be twinned and given that winter is fast approaching and there are no road lines on a 70-kilometre stretch of highway north of the Wandering River community, can the Minister of Transportation at least commit to a definite date that these lines will be repainted?

2:30

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right about one thing. The one thing missing on the section of road is lines. In fact, this government has gone to what I would say is a little bit of an extraordinary measure. They're bringing in a piece of equipment that will actually dry the wet, snowed upon road and allow painting right behind it, a bit of an extraordinary step, but we're doing it because we think that the safety of Albertans is that important. I thank the member for the question. It could be this week. We're hoping by Friday. Again, I can tell you this much, that as soon as the equipment arrives, we will not delay in putting it to work in providing that extra safety for Albertans.

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

Bicycle Safety on Roadways and Trails

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, Edmonton-Gold Bar lost one of its residents in a tragic motor vehicle accident in Prince Edward Island this past summer. Elizabeth Sovis was struck while on a bike, one of the numerous biking vacations she had with her husband, Dr. Edmund Auger. It was Elizabeth's wish that Alberta be a leader in the development of safe cycling trails. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: what steps are being taken to make sure that Alberta's trail system is safe for all users?

Ms Cusanelli: I want to thank the hon. member for my first question in the House. I would also like to thank him very much for being an advocate on behalf of Dr. Auger. I was able to meet with Dr. Auger and, at that time, was able to tell him that we are very sorry for his loss.

Part of what makes the Trans Canada Trail so valuable is the fact that it will provide a safe place for all users to be able to enjoy cycling, walking, OHVs, and even boating here in Alberta. We look forward to continuing the progress along with many of the contributors here in Alberta and, hopefully, to being able to carry on the legacy that Dr. Auger's wife would have liked us to carry on for her.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mentioned progress. Could you give us more of an outline of what that progress is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here in Alberta we have the second-greatest amount of trail to develop, and I can report that we are continuing to make progress. Currently we have about 60 per cent of the Alberta leg completed, which is similar to the extent that Ontario has completed their section. One of our newest

sections is through the Glenbow Ranch provincial park near Calgary. This legacy trail is really going to be the result of hundreds of volunteers coming together and donors who are working with Alberta TrailNet. We are well on our way, but certainly more work is needed.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how is the budget and financing side of the trail doing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta trail is being developed through the nonprofit registered charity organization. I met with Deborah Apps with the Trans Canada Trail and Linda Strong-Watson and Peter Barr with Alberta TrailNet to find collaborative ways in which we can raise money to complete the Alberta portion by 2017. Their trail project is a partnership, and I am so proud to share that Albertans are some of the highest donors in Canada when it comes to raising funds for this trail. Completing the rest of our trail is a big investment, and I know Albertans and the trail foundations will be working collaboratively towards this endeavour to make that happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Cancellation of Funding for Police Training Facility

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cancellation of the Fort Macleod police college is the zenith of PC mismanagement, punishing hard-working Albertans in the region. This PC government came to this community for 13 years consulting with the municipality, businesses, and enforcement agents and handed out contracts in July of 2012. I repeat: July of this year. The government had said over and over that it made sense to build this facility. But after pulling the rug from under the project and the town, there has been no apology made to the people of Fort Macleod or to the businesses and local officials who are being hit in the pocketbook by this decision. When will the Solicitor General pick up the phone, apologize to Fort Macleod, and explain why he . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to thank this hon. member for what I believe is his first question in the House.

As I stated in the media earlier this year, in July of this year I heard from police chiefs in Calgary, in Edmonton, and also the chief commissioner of the RCMP in Alberta, representing 94 per cent of the new recruits in this province, indicating that this facility was not required and would not be fully used. We acted in the taxpayers' interests in cancelling it as quickly as we could.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister please explain how it can be so incompetent for 13 years, promising the project to the people of Fort Macleod and consulting with various enforcement agencies over that time, and then within a single month change its mind completely?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I again thank the member for that question. As I indicated, we acted as quickly as possible in July. If only this member's caucus could act as quickly as possible with their promises. In one breath they say: balance the budget. In

another breath last night all we heard was: spend, spend, spend, more to protect seniors from rising energy costs, another urgent care centre for Sylvan Lake, a new Rocky Mountain hospital. This all costs money, and if we're going to balance the budget, we have to make these tough decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this community was so negatively impacted by the decision to cancel the project, will the government do the right thing and guarantee that the town of Fort Macleod will be compensated for all it has invested, committed, and directed from their own grant fund and that it be returned to them as quickly as possible?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I have met with the entire council of Fort Macleod, and it's unfortunate the member doesn't know that. We've been discussing with them what sort of opportunities can come out of the water infrastructure investments. This is not all bad news. Of course, the opposition would make everyone think that this is awful and bad news, but I can assure him – I even have a quote here from the mayor: we have recently held some positive meetings with representatives and leaders from the various government ministries and are working towards recovering all our expenses and are working with them, and we understand that we can and should come out of this in a position that allows us to continue to forge a bright future for this community. That's this municipality in Fort Macleod that has accepted the decision and understands the new opportunities that are coming forward for that community.

Private Registry Services

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Calgary-North West depend on registry offices for essential services, including drivers' licences and vehicle registrations. My constituency does not have one. We have a large population, a high number of car dealerships in our area, and my constituents are asking for a registry office nearby to make their busy lives easier. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Will you allow for more registry agent offices for more Albertans so they can easily access the services they depend on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to congratulate the member on asking her first question in this House. It was a good question. My first recollection of the member was when I was child and she was on 2 and 7. The best rendition of *Hello, Calgary*, the old theme song of channels 2 and 7, is by this member.

We are excited to move forth with the Association of Registry Agents to provide more online services and an expansion of our registry area network.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I would then counsel the minister to listen to his elders.

I am very glad to hear the ministry is moving forward with plans to better serve my constituents. Even so, it has been a very long time since we've had a new registry office. I'm glad to hear you're reviewing the registry agent model, but what does that mean for my constituents in Calgary-North West?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're looking to move forward with providing more services for Albertans, first of all, providing more services online. Secondly, I'm working with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents to expand our expansion and relocation policy so that Albertans can have access to services closer to home. I'm also looking to find ways to ensure that we have consistent records, consistent service standards to ensure that Albertans receive the services they require.

Ms Jansen: My final question to the minister, Mr. Speaker. We know that there is a tremendous increase in the number of Albertans who are turning to the Internet for their goods and services, and I'm very glad that you've acknowledged that, Minister. This option gives people in rural Alberta the access they need 24 hours a day. So, Minister, are you going to do something about those registry offices to make them available over the Internet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The member has been advocating this, and I've been working on this. We look forward to bringing forward changes in the next short period of time to ensure that Albertans have access to more services online when they need them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, before we proceed with the final member's statement for today, might we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues in the Assembly. You know how excited I get when I get an opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Indeed, joining us today in the public gallery is Roy Skoreyko. Roy is a wonderful constituent, very involved in the community, and is a real advocate. He sat on the PDD board and has advocated around housing, PDD, and mental illness. He is a great addition to my constituency, and I'm delighted to introduce him in the Assembly today. Please join me in welcoming him.

Members' Statements

(continued)

XL Foods Inc. Beef Recall

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the ongoing situation in my constituency of Strathmore-Brooks caused by the temporary shutdown of the XL Foods plant. Yesterday I welcomed news of the plant restarting operations with the approval of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Today I will focus on the impact the closure has had on the community of Brooks and the surrounding region. While I've been tempted to ask a question in question period on this, I would rather not politicize the issue. Instead, all parties need to work together.

I've spoken with many cattle producers and industry groups in the past several weeks, and I've been told the cattle industry has

lost millions of dollars of revenue each day. This is something that affects all of Alberta, from local businesses to service providers to feedlots.

Locally many of the 2,200 workers are living cheque to cheque. The food bank is running out of food. There are families that need winter clothing for the harsh winter ahead. They haven't received any income in weeks, and it looks like they'll be waiting weeks before receiving any kind of payment, with rent due on November 1. It's up to elected representatives to take the initiative and step up to help those that have been affected. I would like to challenge every member of this House to make a \$100 donation, as I have done, to the city of Brooks food bank, which can be done online at brooks.ca, and you will receive a tax receipt.

The Newell regional economic development initiative under the county of Newell recently released a study on the economic impact of the closure of the XL Foods plant. The total economic loss for the Newell region amounted to an estimated \$226,000 in wages each day that this plant was closed. The closure represents a tremendous loss to the community and local businesses. Although the situation looks positive with JBS, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and XL Foods working together, we're not out of the woods yet. Government needs to listen closely to what the industry is saying now and take actions to help the workers in Brooks.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance on behalf of.

Bill 2

Responsible Energy Development Act

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I would like to request leave on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Energy to introduce Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act.

Through Bill 2 Alberta is setting the stage for the next 50 years of effective and efficient energy resource regulation and development. The proposed legislation will create a single regulator for oil, gas, oil sands, and coal. The new regulator will be efficient and effective for landowners, efficient and effective for industry, and committed to Alberta's stringent environmental standards.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and in accordance with the legislation table the requisite number of copies of the 2011-12 annual report for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to table an article from the CBC referencing a Macdonald-Laurier report which seems to indicate that Alberta's fiscal structure is at some peril going forward. I've long said this, too, and it looks like increasing

numbers of people are joining that chorus. I have the requisite number of copies here and will go forth from that.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have here the requisite number of copies of two documents I referenced yesterday in my speech on Bill 1, one called Stress at Work, Mental Injury and the Law in Canada and another from *Clinical Psychology Review* from 2012.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, then it's my pleasure pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2011, through March 31, 2012.

I think we have a point of order which the hon. Member for Airdrie wished to address. Hon. Member for Airdrie, please proceed.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the point of order that I referred to, I'd like to cite Standing Order 23.

Mr. Hancock: It's (h), (i), and (j).

Mr. Anderson: I've learned so much from this member about (h), (i), and (j) over the years. He's trained me well.

Actually, I'm not using (h), (i), and (j). I'm just going to use (j), with regard to the Education minister using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I think you would agree that his language in his answer to the question clearly created massive amounts of disorder, and I'm going to tell you why, Mr. Speaker.

In his comments he flat out says that the Wildrose would cut spending to infrastructure, would cut infrastructure projects out of the budget, and he gives numbers from our alternative budget. Of course, what the Wildrose has always said is that, indeed, we would take the projects on the capital list and take the ones that could wait a year or two and spread those out over an extra year or two. That's what we've said consistently. Now, that is the truth of the matter.

However, it's really amazing that this minister would say that when, after the first-quarter update was released just recently, this very Finance minister was quoted in several newspapers and radio shows. I'm just taking one; I could cite more. After saying that the financial situation is worse than forecast, the Treasury Board President says that

unless things change, the provincial government is looking at lower energy royalties than budgeted in the first quarter of this year. If that happens, government departments have been put on notice that they may have to reduce operational spending and look at whether capital spending plans can be deferred.

That seems to be exactly what the Wildrose position is, Mr. Speaker, exactly the same position.

2:50

When this minister here comes into this House and, I believe, uses very abusive and insulting language by misleading Albertans into thinking that the Wildrose would cut the schools and the roads and the facilities that the people of Alberta need while his government is saying something else, that is simply not the case. I

think we're both saying that in times of trouble we need to make sure that we defer infrastructure projects so that we can balance the budget, so that we can live within our means. That is what the position of this party has been, and finally the government seems to be coming to around to it. Congratulations for following us on that.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I feel the need to defend myself somewhat. I certainly didn't intend to be abusive or hurt anyone's feelings by any stretch of the imagination. We may disagree on what the facts are here. It seems like this is more an exercise in extending debate than actually talking about abuse in the House because we did have a rather raucous session here.

I've got two documents in front of me, Mr. Speaker. If I misspoke, I'll apologize. This one is the alternative budget from the Wildrose from 2012, that clearly says that they would save \$1.623 billion out of the capital budget. They would cut roughly \$1.7 billion out of the budget. This was brought forward just before the election. The previous one that I referred to was the Wildrose alternative budget from 2011, which clearly states that they would cut \$2.41 billion out of the capital budget. So I'm not sure that I misspoke, misled anyone. I don't have the Blues to see my language exactly, but I certainly didn't intend to be abusive.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the hon. member would rise under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Now, if anybody should understand what that section means.

However, it's very clear that the hon. member has not been listening to himself or to his party leader because if he had, he'd not only understand the concept of abusive and insulting language, but he'd also understand that you cannot advocate, as he and virtually every one of the members on his side of the House have in their maiden speeches, for building things in their constituencies – not a bad thing to do because we do need to have the infrastructure for this province to grow – and then by the same token say: balance the budget, including capital spending; and, by the way, pay cash for your capital spending and cut that amount; and don't build the capital stuff right now; but, by the way, I need a school in my riding. Or was it five?

The Speaker: Are there others? Thank you.

Hon. members, let me first direct you to *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I think that yesterday I spoke to this, and I'll be very brief today to simply say that the hon. Member for Airdrie has stood and clarified his party's position and his point, and it's all recorded in *Hansard* now. Thank you. The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Government House Leader, have stood up and indicated their points. This, to me, is much more a difference of opinion and a point of clarification than it is a significant point of order. It's not infrequent that we'll have varying accounts of the same issue, and I think that is the case today. So we're going to accept the clarifications as being just that, and we're going to move on with Orders of the Day, I believe.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 6
Protection and Compliance Statutes
Amendment Act, 2012

Mr. Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, I ask approval to introduce the Protection and Compliance Statutes Amendment Act for second reading.

Albertans have the right to expect a safe a workplace, the right to feel secure in the belief that work done around and for them is in keeping with the safety codes that are in place, and the right to expect to be treated fairly in business transactions.

This act amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Safety Codes Act, and the Fair Trading Act. These amendments have been bundled together because they share common threads. They all address penalties for when laws governing safety and fair trade practices are contravened. These are all aimed at improving health, safety, and fairness for Albertans in public, in the marketplace, and on the work site. The intent of this legislation is to ensure willing and active compliance with existing regulations by creating new penalties and bolstering those that already exist for those who ignore the provisions of the three acts being amended.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the great majority of employers and businesses in Alberta willingly and carefully comply with the rules that are in place which govern their activities. However, there are some who repeatedly and chronically choose not to do so. The provisions of this act are aimed directly at them. This act sends a clear message that they will not be able to flout the rules and put either the safety or financial security of Albertans at risk without meaningful consequences.

Administrative penalties will allow regulators to do much more than issue a warning to violators. In the past many of these warnings have been ignored, and the only way to deal with the situation was through protracted and costly suspensions or prosecutions. Administrative penalties provide for a middle ground, one which points to the seriousness of the violation in question and government's commitment to eliminating those violations.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The seriousness and commitment of government is evident in the fines that can be levied under each of the amendments in each of these three acts. The Occupational Health and Safety Act is under the jurisdiction of Alberta Human Services. It covers all aspects of health and safety in the workplace. The amendments to this act will add maximum administrative penalties of \$10,000 per occurrence per day and will provide an effective way of dealing with high-risk noncompliers.

The Safety Codes Act is under the jurisdiction of Municipal Affairs. It covers construction and maintenance of safe buildings and equipment and related public safety. These amendments will bring a three-year limitation period in which charges can be laid and increase maximum court fines to \$100,000 for a first offence and \$500,000 for a second offence.

The Fair Trading Act is under the jurisdiction of Service Alberta. It prohibits unfair practices and misleading advertising in connection with consumer transactions. It also provides consumer cancellation rights, a seller's code of conduct, and requires some types of businesses to be licensed. Amendments to this act

introduce new administrative penalties of up to \$100,000 and increase maximum court fines from \$15,000 to \$100,000 for a first offence and from \$30,000 to \$100,000 for subsequent offences.

No one is likely to see those fines as a slap on the wrist, Mr. Speaker. They're intended to be a wake-up call for those who put their interests ahead of safety and fairness. The administrative penalties make it clear that the cost of doing business is greatly reduced when they play by the rules. The Protection and Compliance Statutes Amendment Act is about accountability. Those who put the public in danger will be held accountable for their actions. Those who do not believe in the need for a fair marketplace and who erode customer confidence will be held accountable. Those who put workers at risk of injury or death will be held accountable.

Albertans have the right to expect a safe workplace. They have the right to feel secure in the expectation that work done around and for them is in keeping with the safety codes that are in place, and they have the right to expect to be treated fairly in business transactions. This act will go a long way in helping to meet those expectations.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:00

Bill 9
Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2012

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is the first time that you've been in the chair this session. It looks good on you.

I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 9, the Corporate Tax Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is recognized by many as a place of opportunity. The province was pioneered on the vision and innovation of early settlers, who transformed what was once their dreams, the opportunity they had, and their vision into a thriving region in which millions of Albertans live, play, and work. Today Alberta continues to attract visionaries and innovators, people who make it their business to move Alberta forward. The Alberta government supports the work of these modern-day pioneers, and the changes proposed in Bill 9 will ensure that Alberta continues to maintain a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime, a drawing card for many businesses around the world.

The biggest change to the act is an enhancement to the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. This program reflects the government's recognition of the importance of research and development in Alberta. It provides a refundable tax credit to corporations for research and development in Alberta. The proposed amendments, originally announced in Budget 2012, will enhance annual benefits to Alberta companies by \$25 million, making more funds available to support research and development in those Alberta companies. Ultimately, the changes to the scientific research and development tax credit will make this program more competitive and underscore Alberta as a place for research and development.

Bill 9 also includes proposed technical, administrative, and policy changes that, if passed, will ensure that Alberta's tax regime remains fair and equitable. We propose to eliminate an insurance company's ability to claim different reserve amounts to cover future claims for federal and Alberta purposes. Currently insurers are deducting different amounts for Alberta and federal

tax purposes, and as a result they may pay the federal taxes but may avoid paying provincial taxes. Bill 9 would eliminate this practice, thereby simplifying both administration and maintaining a higher degree of fairness in our system.

Also in the spirit of fairness Bill 9 proposes changes that would help ensure that all corporations pay their taxes. One of our challenges is that sometimes – and this will come as no surprise, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker – corporate debtors don't provide government with up-to-date contact information, making it difficult to collect the said payment. The proposed amendments would ensure we have the legislative authority to use outside databases to find those folks. We've also added a provision that would allow us to release taxpayer information in certain specific circumstances such as upon request of the Auditor General.

The final amendment I'll touch upon proposes some changes to the insurance corporations tax. This is to clarify the definition of marine insurance. Basically, we're proposing to clarify the exemption for marine insurance so that, consistent with past policy, insurance on pleasure craft continues to be subject to the tax.

While I've highlighted the most significant of the proposals, there are several other amendments to the Corporate Tax Act. There are also technical corrections to correct the calculation of the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. I'm only mentioning this, Mr. Speaker, because it does take up about eight pages of the bill, it is about the calculation, and our time here is limited. The remaining amendments are minor in nature and are needed to keep our legislation both current and effective.

Alberta's ongoing attention and improvement to our tax regime is an important factor in our position as a destination to live and run a business and one of the reasons we continue to attract the best and the brightest. I encourage all members to support Bill 9, the Corporate Tax Amendment Act, and I now move to adjourn debate on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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 October 23: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the next speaker, the hon. member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. It's just Airdrie now, Mr. Speaker. That's okay.

It is an honour to stand before you today as the newly re-elected member for the wonderful constituency of Airdrie. I count it as one of the greatest honours of my life that the people of my hometown have trusted me to represent their families and loved ones in this Legislature. I thank them for trusting me and also for

trusting my reasons and motives for joining the Wildrose two and a half years ago. It seems a lot longer than that. I did it because I felt my constituents deserved an MLA who was able to fight and vote freely for what I feel is in the best interests of both my constituents and Albertans.

There is a self-evident truth, I believe, and it is that an MLA without a free vote is a constituency without true representation. I am honoured that the people of Airdrie and area overwhelmingly endorsed my decision at the polls in the spring. It is a trust I will continue to work daily as hard as I can to uphold.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to say how much I love and am grateful for my mom and dad. Any strengths I have I owe to my father and mother in the way that they raised me, while my weaknesses – and they are certainly many – are all my own. [interjection] That's right. That's called personal responsibility, for those across the aisle.

Of course, there is my family. There is no one I love and admire more in the world than my beautiful wife and best friend, Anita. The blessing of sharing our life together is simply the best thing that will ever happen to me, not only because I get to spend my whole life with my best friend but also because of our four beautiful children: Derek, Bryce, Spencer, and little Joshua. Although it's an honour to serve in this House, the worst part of this job is being away from them, Mr. Speaker. However, it makes me cherish all the more the time that I do spend with them when I'm at home. Nothing in this world brings me more happiness than they do, and I always want to make sure they know that, no matter what life brings.

Mr. Speaker, I am an Albertan, born and raised. I love this province. I cannot get enough of her. I'm almost irrational about it. When I'm driving around Alberta, one minute I'll be on my iPod listening to Metallica and Aerosmith and rocking out to that, and then the next minute Paul Brandt's *Alberta Bound* comes on, and I start tearing up. It's really weird, but I can't help it. I don't think many of us can. Who can resist the look of driving toward the Rockies in the summer and watching those huge giants loom up as we go to Banff or Jasper? Who doesn't gaze and wonder at the miles upon miles of yellow canola fields under a deep blue Alberta sky? Who doesn't smile peacefully when driving through the rolling hills and valleys of cattle country with those iconic pumpjacks working their magic in the backdrop, symbolizing in a perfect picture the combination of natural beauty, hard work, and the we-can-do-anything spirit that is so quintessentially Albertan?

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this House come here for different reasons. My reasons are these. I believe Alberta has the potential to be one of the greatest ongoing success stories in the world. I believe we can become a world magnet for families, entrepreneurs, artists, and any hard-working soul wanting to find a better life and that we can be that place long after the age of oil has passed. I believe that the key to becoming that kind of province is to recommit ourselves to the principles of personal freedom and democracy that have repeatedly proven to be the cornerstone of any truly just, fair, and prosperous society.

So I must ask: does this government's agenda promote freedom and democracy? Does it empower Albertans to better themselves by allowing them the freedom to make the choices they feel are best? Or is it an agenda that enshrines a government-knows-best attitude using trickle-down, government policies?

For example, I believe in economic freedom. As someone who loves to read and study history, I am convinced that the free market system is the only economic model on Earth that has consistently shown the ability to lift millions of people from poverty into the middle class and, in many cases, beyond. It would take hours upon hours to adequately outline the improvements in

life expectancy, quality of life, technology, innovation, the arts, human rights, and so many others that have come about because of the power of the free market to capture the naturally innovative and aspiring spirits of mankind. In such a system the government's role is not to compete with the free market and its entrepreneurs and innovators; it is to set a fair playing field, enforce the rules, and get the heck out of the way.

3:10

This PC government has not improved our economic freedoms. Our regulatory burden is one of the largest and most inefficient in the country. Many would-be investors in Alberta are uncertain about this government's growing reputation of changing the rules of the game to suit their political purposes of the moment. Examples include spending billions in taxpayer funds to pick winners and loser with corporate handouts like the \$2 billion carbon capture grant giveaway; messing around with the royalty framework six or seven times before finally settling it; seizing oil, gas, and grazing leases and other property rights without guarantees of proper compensation; shutting down for no good reason independent private health facilities working within the public system; and the constant flirtations with tax increases. The bottom line is that we are less economically free and less stable than we have been in decades, and that has to change.

We need to always be asking ourselves, "What can we do to responsibly free our entrepreneurs and job creators?" rather than "How can we milk them and burden them just a little bit more to pad government coffers or fulfill some random wish of a special-interest group?" This is the economic freedom I and my Wildrose colleagues are here to fight for.

That brings me to another freedom. I believe in being free from debt, free from government debt. We all remember the great accomplishment in 2005, when Ralph Klein announced that Alberta was debt free. All of the sacrifices of the '90s were over, and we were now free of the burden of debt. I remember the photograph, Ralph standing beside this huge cheque with "paid in full" emblazoned across it. Now we could build that heritage fund. At that time the feeling was that we could build that heritage fund and invest oil and gas revenues in a fund that would eventually earn enough annual interest that we wouldn't have to rely on volatile oil and gas revenues any longer. We could use the fund to build up multibillion-dollar research and scholarship endowments for generations to benefit from. And we could do this while still spending what we needed on infrastructure and core social programs.

But we all know it didn't work that way. Instead, this government went on an unprecedented spending spree, increasing capital spending by roughly 700 per cent in less than a decade, resulting in massive inflation and cost overruns with relatively little to show for it. They spent billions upon billions on public union salaries and pensions, driving them up to be by far the highest in Canada and much more lucrative than their equivalents in the private sector. Our heritage fund was continually raided until it became worth less when adjusted for inflation than in 1976, when Premier Lougheed first established it. In addition, Ralph's \$17 billion rainy-day fund is now almost gone, and our financial net worth as a province is down one full half in just five years. And now, even with oil at \$90 to \$100, the government has decided to return us into debt to finance their spending addiction. In fact, a report by the well-respected MacDonald-Laurier Institute says that Alberta is the most likely province in all of Canada to face an EU-style debt crisis because of its high spending and overreliance on oil revenues.

I and my Wildrose colleagues are here to fight this fiscal madness. We will not sit back while this government mortgages our children's futures. We will not let this government squander opportunities that every other jurisdiction on Earth can only dream of. We will not buy the excuses or the implication that if we don't borrow to spend, we can't build schools or treat the sick. It's simply not true. We can have world-class schools, medical facilities, roads, and other infrastructure and still live within our exceptionally considerable financial means. But it does mean we need a government that knows the difference between our needs and our wants and isn't burdened with feeling obligated to pay back certain groups and individuals for political support and favours. We must remain free of debt and save for the future so our children can become even more economically free than we are.

Freedom must be pursued and protected in other areas as well. The freedom of parents to choose the type of education and the learning environment that best suits their child's learning needs and their family's values is critical. Yes, our education system is good, but it could be so much better if we would allow more competition and innovation into the education system, more public schools with specialized programs, charter schools, francophone schools, faith-based schools, specialty schools for trades or those with learning disabilities, and different types of learning methods that ensure children are able to work at a pace that works best for them while ensuring that learning problems are caught early and opportunities to excel faster than others are made available if wanted and desired. Freedom in education means better education for all of our children.

Then there is freedom in health care. So-called progressives have got to open their minds to new possibilities. I always thought that's what it meant to be progressive, but the almost religious devotion of progressives to the current method of delivering universal health care is difficult to comprehend. We know from universal health systems around the world that we can give Albertans more choices on who they want to provide health care to them. We don't need to hold on to the broken systems and ancient, ritualistic ways of providing health care, all the while ignoring the horrendous inefficiencies of our current systems. There are so many universal health systems around the world that provide patient choice and competition and, most importantly, better results for people. Let's embrace these ideas, not reject them out of fear.

Finally, there is the freedom to live in a society free of government corruption and intimidation. I know and recognize full well that the majority of members opposite are not corrupt, but they are part of a governing culture, an apparatus, that has become corrupted, in my view. I know they say that there's no culture of entitlement or corruption or anything untoward. Well, then stop claiming it and start proving it because your government's actions do not match your rhetoric.

A transparent and accountable government does not hire ex-cabinet ministers back into their old departments mere months after they are turfed by voters. Transparent governments don't campaign on fiscal responsibility during the election, then vote themselves an 8 per cent raise right after the election. Accountable governments don't promise to balance the budget during an election, and then decide to change what the definition of a balanced budget is after the election.

Clean governments don't base their decisions on where to build new schools or hospitals on what party the area's MLA belongs to. They don't promise a wide-reaching health inquiry to get down to the bottom of widespread intimidation of our health professionals and then neuter that inquiry so that threats and intimidation can be swept under the rug. Transparent Premiers don't post their

expenses only after being FOIPed by the opposition; they do it before. They don't charge their Law Society fees, Air Miles card fees, and lip balm to the taxpayer and then try to justify it. They don't spend a million dollars on a taxpayer-sponsored Olympic party and try to say that it was good value for money.

Mr. Speaker, we need a government that knows the difference between right and wrong, between transparency and secrecy, accountability and corruption. I and my Wildrose colleagues will fight to make sure Albertans live in a province free from government corruption, intimidation, and entitlement. We cannot truly have freedom for our people without it. Ronald Reagan once said:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like . . . [when] men were free.

I love this province and its people. I know we can be the best place on Earth to live, work, and raise a family, with a strong and certain future based on a purposefully chosen path today. I believe that the principles of freedom – economic freedom, freedom of speech, freedom from debt, freedom in health care and education, and freedom from government corruption and intimidation – will see Alberta achieve its potential as a place of hope and prosperity in the world for Albertans both today and tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I've asked this of a number of different people that have already given their responses to the throne speech, so I'd like to extend the same thing to the hon. member, and that is: could he name three personal issues and three constituency issues that he'd like to drive forward, that are important to him? We all come here, I hope, because we want to change the world. What are the things that you want to change either to make better or eliminate? Could you share that with me?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie in response, through the chair.

3:20

Mr. Anderson: So many, but I will give you three. You know, one of the main things I think is that if we're going to fix the budget in this province – and that is one of my goals, hon. members, to see us with a truly balanced budget, one where we're not taking on debt as debt servicing costs and all these types of things – we have got to take the politics out of infrastructure in this province. It is a huge part of our budget – \$7 billion, \$6 billion, \$5 billion – whatever the year is. It's a huge chunk of money, and what's happening in this province, I believe, is that it has been highly politicized.

If you go to the city of Calgary website or the city of Edmonton website, you can actually look and see what the actual order is of the projects that are coming up, whether it be a recreational facility or a road or anything like that. You can tell right away what's next on the list. That kind of transparency is incredible because what it does is that it allows – if something moves up or down the list all of a sudden randomly, was that done for political reasons, or was there a population change, or did something change to make that change important to occur?

That's what we need done in the province. We have all these requests coming for schools and health facilities and all of these things. Why can't we come up with an infrastructure priority list that is transparent, completely transparent? List it out, put it online, make sure everybody knows where they are in the queue and what pieces of information, what criteria, were used to put them there so everyone can be confident of that.

Then when the Finance minister comes with a budgeted amount of money, whether that be 4 and a half billion dollars or, in their case, \$6 billion or whatever, whatever the amount is, we know that that huge amount of money is being spent on the top 40, 50, 100, whatever it is, projects that are the most important to get done that year, that it's not being politicized, that deals aren't being cut between powerful cabinet ministers or MLAs that need help with their re-election or to punish a constituency in some cases or whatever. That would just do so much to improve not only the civility in Alberta's politics but to improve the way that we budget. I guarantee we could get so much more bang for our buck, for our infrastructure dollar if we did it that way, but we don't.

That's one thing, hon. member, balancing the budget, depoliticizing infrastructure in this province.

Also, one thing I am passionate about is education. One of my little guys has autism, and we've been going through that journey with him. He's just beyond precious. One thing we have noticed is that in early childhood development he got the support he needed, and thank goodness for that. We really have some great programs in the zero to six age grouping there for kids with disabilities. But after six we're noticing that it really drops off. For a lot of these kids a lot of the behavioural problems and the things that cause so many problems down the road happen in their K to 4 years, and they never get that back. It's almost like they just lose all that support they're getting. They get some, but it's just not anywhere near the same. That's one area I'd really like to focus on in education.

Also, as I spoke about in my remarks, just the idea that we could create a curriculum, create choices so that parents – children learn in such different ways. You know, boys are much more hands on as a general rule; girls really excel in other ways, using other learning methods. I think if we could start introducing curriculum and learning opportunities that were really personalized to the individual child and allowed them to work at their own pace and in their own way and be able to identify right away if they're falling behind or if they have the desire to go ahead, give them that opportunity. I think that introducing those types of models into our public system but also the charter system would be a big improvement.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great honour that I speak today in the House in response to the throne speech, and it is exciting to be back here with all of you people. As many of you have mentioned, none of us would be here without the hard work of the volunteers and supporters, but above all else not a single one of us would be here without the trust and support of our constituents. We must remember that we are here to represent them, not tell them what to do.

We would not be here without the support of our amazing family and friends, so to all of these people: thank you for putting your trust in me. And thank you to all of my colleagues. I salute you and your efforts.

I extend congratulations to you as well, Mr. Speaker, for your election to the chair. I hope we have the pleasure of working together for many years to come.

I am pleased to extend well wishes to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his dedication to serving Alberta and Her Majesty as well as for presenting the Speech from the Throne.

I was elected to represent the constituency of Medicine Hat in the far southeast corner of the great province of Alberta. We are entirely surrounded by the constituency represented by my friend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I am the 14th elected MLA, representing the seventh different political party in this constituency. I am only the 822nd person elected as an MLA in the 107 years as a province. Now with a population of almost 3.8 million people it is a very humbling position, indeed.

Medicine Hat was represented by Liberals from 1905 to 1913 and then the Conservatives from 1913 to 1921. Between 1921 and 1926 we were a multimember constituency, which included representation from the hon. Perren Baker, whom I will speak more about later. Social Credit was represented from 1935 to 1975 by both John and Elizabeth Robinson, quite possibly the first husband and wife to serve as MLAs. The hon. Jim Horsman served from 1975 to 1993 under Premier Lougheed. Premier Lougheed was a leader among leaders, a statesman respected across Canada. My wish is that all MLAs, including those members in government, will strive with the honour of Premier Lougheed. Most recently the hon. Rob Renner served from 1993 till retirement in 2012. Many of these MLAs held various ministerial roles, and it proves that our part of the province provides major talent.

A common thread my predecessors recognized is that government has an important but small role to play. My constituents realize that when change is needed, Albertans will lead the way, as witnessed by 34 per cent voting Wildrose on April 23.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned Perren Baker previously, and I would like to speak more about him. He was first elected in 1921, serving the United Farmers. As well, we know the wild rose is Alberta's provincial flower and is a fantastic representation of Alberta. The wild rose is strong, hardy, and resilient, and it is also the name of the caucus that I am very proud to sit with. You may be wondering why I mention both Mr. Baker and the wild rose. Well, in 1930, when the wild rose was chosen as our provincial flower, it was done with assistance from Alberta's schoolchildren when Mr. Baker was our Minister of Education. Without that process and without Mr. Baker we may have picked the prairie sage. We may have chosen the hairy false golden aster, or we could have selected the horned bladderwort, all flowers found in Alberta. I know I am thankful to them for the choice of the wild rose, not only because it is a beautiful flower and a great symbol for Albertans, as mentioned, but because I don't know how many of my colleagues would want to sit as the Horned Bladderwort Party.

I was raised on the Sunny Slope farm, my Danish grandfather's homestead north of Gull Lake, Saskatchewan. Besides helping on the farm, I grew up listening to and playing music, participating in sports, including track and field, hockey, football, and riding motocross. I enjoyed the freedoms, lessons, and opportunities that farm life offered, but in 1985 I entered the oil and gas supply industry. I arrived in Medicine Hat in 1994, and in 1996 I met the love of my life, Angela Kolody. She is my rock and she is my strength, and I could not be here without her love, guidance, and support.

In 1999 I was very fortunate to become a business partner with a supply company I worked in, and through hard work and a lot of determination life has been good to us. We have a passion for

travel. While we have travelled domestically and internationally, Medicine Hat is home and quite simply is one of the best places in the world to live, work, and play.

I've always been a conservative, but in recent years I found myself without a true conservative party. Like many Albertans, I found a home in the new conservative grassroots party called Wildrose. In 2011 I attended a rally where our leader, now the amazing Leader of the Official Opposition, spoke in Medicine Hat, and I decided to run for public office. At the time Premier Stelmach was in firm control of a majority government, the current MLA was in his 18th year, and I was entering my 27th year in the oil and gas industry. I guess you could say that life has changed a bit because after a hard-fought campaign the voters put their trust in me and the Wildrose to represent them in the Legislature.

3:30

What has amazed me is how many Albertans not only talk about change but also the right kind of change and, above all, the type of change that will put Albertans first. As a former drummer in a band I feel a connection to the Scorpions rock band. Like the Scorpions, I feel the wind of change is upon us. This change is political, though, and it is based on our history of strong conservative principles and values. Our seniors are being left behind, families aren't being listened to, and farmers and ranchers are being ignored and ridiculed by the current government. This government does not represent change, and they continue to show the inability to change. But hang on, Alberta, because change is coming. It's coming from this side of the House, and most importantly it's coming from Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Medicine Hat is an amazing place to call home, with over 60,000 residents, and we are growing and thinking bigger. Alberta is growing, too, but we all face challenges. Every city is competing for companies, large and small, to provide employment for their citizens. I will work with not only our community organizations but, most importantly, with each and every Albertan to ensure we do our best to promote Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat is rich in history, including the First Nations, who lived here and provided our city with its name. We are rich in culture, and we have a quality of life nearly impossible to find anywhere else. Medicine Hat is situated along the banks of the mighty South Saskatchewan River, spreading outward on both sides. Water is life, and we are fortunate to have sufficient quantities to sustain us now and well into the future.

Medicine Hat owns their power generation plant, and we are a producer and supplier of oil and natural gas. We have been referred to, as my friend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat mentioned in his speech yesterday, by Rudyard Kipling in the early 1900s as having "all hell for a basement." Medicine Hat is a leader in promoting alternative energy systems through grants. Plus, we are embarking on a solar power electricity program unique in Canada. This innovation taking place in Medicine Hat is what's truly exciting.

Medicine Hat has a wide array of indoor and outdoor activities, and we enjoy an extensive park and path system. The summers are hot, the days are long, and winter is broken by the warm and regular chinook winds. Medicine Hat's sunrises and sunsets are second to none, and being blessed with having the magnificent Cypress Hills nearby along with kilometres of open, rolling countryside, it is no wonder we are known as the Oasis on the Prairies. It is a slice of heaven I am thankful to call home.

Medicine Hat not only services southeastern Alberta but also southwestern Saskatchewan as a hub to well over 100,000 people. There are a number of churches and religions plus a myriad of

groups and social organizations that people can join to get involved in their community. The Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede celebrated its 125th anniversary this year, making us older than the Calgary Stampede, and we are darn proud of that.

Medalta Potteries is an amazing historical site and resource, but it has also moved into the 21st century by accepting artists in residence from around the world to mix history into new ways and ideas of art. Our Medicine Hat College grows year after year, not only in curriculum but also with their reputation.

Our annual JazzFest, running for 16 consecutive years, makes it the longest running jazz festival in Alberta. We have multiple theatre and dance groups performing in small venues right up to our renowned Esplanade. As the Official Opposition critic for Culture I am very proud to support and highlight the great cultural scene in Medicine Hat, and I look forward to working collaboratively with my friend the Minister of Culture.

We are proud to have the REDI Enterprises Society call Medicine Hat home. This amazing group works with individuals that face physical and mental challenges by providing caretaking or housing options as well as providing work training and job placement. REDI also works with those suffering brain injuries and assists in their rehabilitation. A unique program, REDI recycling, raises funds to support their operations while helping the environment. REDI is truly an inclusive community solution to diverse community challenges and issues within Medicine Hat.

Our key industries are manufacturing, oil and gas production and processing, defence and aerospace, construction, agriculture, and tourism. We benefit from the proximity of CFB Suffield and BATUS and DRDC. This is one of the largest military training and research bases of its kind in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Medicine Hat does have some challenges, yet we also have the capabilities to meet them head-on. Alberta has embarked on a 10-year plan to end homelessness while Medicine Hat has taken on a more ambitious five-year plan. With social support groups working together, Medicine Hat could be the first city in Alberta to meet this goal, and what an amazing accomplishment that would be.

Medicine Hat was and still is feeling the effects of the PC royalty review. Due to the natural gas based resource industry surrounding us, the current low market prices are driving our local companies and employees to other parts of the country and the world. Penalizing the experience, technology, equipment, and business owners with expensive, burdensome, and complicated interprovincial barriers and regulations is not the way to maximize our wealth of local talent. Most levels of industry suffer from this problem, and government must correct their mistakes before it's too late.

Medicine Hat is finally receiving our hospital expansion that has been talked about for almost a decade, having been promised and postponed and then repromised. We hope it will be completed as intended without further delays or facility service reductions. Embarrassingly, though, in a province as wealthy and fortunate as Alberta, Medicine Hat is still the only major city in Alberta without a detox and treatment facility. There are issues around doctor shortages, schools and teachers, affordable retirement facilities, plus many families and individuals simply struggle day to day just to survive.

I will help individuals as much as I possibly can. If someone has been wronged by our government, I want to help to make it right. I say this to the government: I stand here today not only to challenge and speak up but also to support you in making decisions beneficial to Albertans. Be assured that as the opposition we do not simply think that our job is to oppose for the sake of opposing; however, when you do something unacceptable, we will

stand up for Albertans and make sure their voices are heard. Remember that 56 per cent of Albertans did not vote for the current government; hence, there is much they should listen to.

Mr. Speaker, lastly but most importantly, I will serve all of my constituents and all Albertans no matter what their political leaning is. I shall do this with honour, with respect, and with humility, and I will always put the needs of Albertans before everything else. I fully understand that I am the current but temporary voice of the voters of Medicine Hat, and my job is to represent them to the best of my abilities, not build personal empires.

In conclusion, take a little Scorpions, add a little bit of Medicine Hat, combine a pinch of Saskatchewan, mix it all together really well, and I feel the renewed wind of change is upon us. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I had the pleasure of growing up in Medicine Hat and was pretty much raised there, so I appreciate everything you had to say, as we all do anyway. But my question for the member is that the one thing I didn't hear you mention was the junior A hockey team, the Medicine Hat Tigers. Are they a proud franchise? Did you want to touch on them at all? Just having a bit of a connection there from me. Are you a proud Tigers supporter? I'm curious.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Now, I do realize that the member is sitting beside you, but our tradition means that you speak to the chair.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat in response. Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my hon. colleague for the question. The Medicine Hat history in sports goes way back. We do have the Medicine Hat Tigers. I am a big fan. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat did mention them yesterday, so I didn't want to double up on the same speech, but, yeah, I'm a very big Tigers fan. I have my jersey. I mean, Lanny McDonald, Kelly Hrudey: some of those great people came through the Medicine Hat Tigers organization.

It's fantastic that these young individuals are chasing their dreams, I think, as many of us are, right? The opportunity afforded to us here in the Legislature, you know – these opportunities don't come along. Not very many people are able to grasp that brass ring as it goes along on the carousel. Not many people even want to put themselves out to be those people. But you see young individuals chasing their dreams, and it's so great that we can be part of Medicine Hat to watch these young folks do that.

3:40

We also have a great baseball team, the Medicine Hat Mavericks. Sports, I think, is big in a lot of the smaller communities. I think it's that connection that communities, you know, give back to their sporting people. It's also nice, I guess, coming from a smaller centre. We don't have the NHL in place, so we still have our hockey to watch this year.

It is great. Medicine Hat is a great sporting town, and I appreciate the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We still have some time. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, a pleasure to hear from you, Member. A couple of comments. You may not know this, or you may, but this is my 10th anniversary of being in the Legislature as a result of your predecessor, all credit to your predecessor, who fired me from the Palliser health region in 2002. It was a real shock to me to have him replaced there, and a pleasure, let me say that. It always rankled a bit for me to have him . . .

Mr. Hancock: No. It's his neighbour.

Dr. Swann: Oh, I'm sorry. I have the wrong person. Anyway, it's an opportunity to highlight that.

Medicine Hat is close to my heart, having worked there 10 years. The other thing I think it's opportune to raise is: how do you feel about the public utility in Medicine Hat and how that's kept prices low and people really in very favourable straits in terms of their energy portfolios? Would you comment on that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much to the member for the question. Medicine Hat is very blessed that we do own our own utilities: our power generation, our oil and gas division. It's put us in a really positive spot within, I guess, our own fiscal framework. We're able to identify the needs on the supply side. We can run that revenue through into the power generation side. Sometimes one side will make a profit one year; sometimes they both make a profit. It is a huge advantage when we control the power generation, when we control a lot of the natural gas production coming in.

The city just branched out and bought I think it was a couple of hundred oil wells south of Medicine Hat. We're branching out into that resource sector to make sure that we have a balanced portfolio. We've realized that having natural gas so heavily weighted into our city finances has normally been a very good thing, but in this last downturn it's been a bit of a negative, so they've decided to get into the oil industry to try and balance that portfolio. They're trying to redevelop an older field, and they're having some good initial successes.

So it is beneficial, I think.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, we have seven seconds.

Dr. Swann: For your information, it was Minister Lorne Taylor at the time who ensured that I was fired, and I believe that you replaced him.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I will now recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-McLeod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good day, everyone. My name is Pat Stier. Firstly, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on being elected to your new position as Speaker of the House. I'm sure that your many years of experience will be of great assistance in your future endeavours here, presiding over the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pride that I rise here today to speak to the Assembly as the representative from Livingstone-McLeod. I am proud, happy, and thrilled to serve the people of such a fabulous, vast, and beautiful area of this province. I'm following in the footsteps of many very distinguished predecessors – Mr. Evan Berger, Mr. David Coutts, Mr. LeRoy Fjordbotten, and Mr.

Frederick Bradley, just to name a few – all of whom did a fine job of representing their constituents. I have a great deal of respect for all of these gentlemen, and I will be diligent in my efforts to uphold their very high standards.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a lifelong resident of the southern foothills region. I live on what remains of my family's farm today. My grandparents were pioneers and settled in the Beddington and Okotoks areas initially, then later Blackie at the turn of the last century. My parents eventually became owners of a ranch near De Winton, where we as a family raised Angus cattle, Arabian horses, plus grain and hay crops for over 30 years. Throughout my own working career I was employed primarily in a seismic data segment of the oil and gas industry in Calgary and spent many years in municipal government, including four years as a municipal councillor.

Prior to my nomination and the recent election I continued to work in the MD of Foothills as a rural land planning consultant, which included projects in many of the areas of Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Speaker, once again the constituency boundaries for Livingstone-Macleod have changed, and in the recent 2012 election the footprint of the riding was adjusted significantly towards the north with areas that were formerly part of the Foothills-Rocky View, Banff-Cochrane, and Highwood ridings, including the communities of Priddis, Millarville, Turner Valley, Black Diamond, Longview, Meadowbank, and Cayley along with the acreage areas near Red Deer Lake just south of Calgary. To the south another adjustment was made where the areas south of the Waterton River, including the Blood reserve, were removed. So, then, for clarity purposes so that we all understand what a big area it is, the new boundary now stretches along the western side from Priddis in the northwest corner all the way to the southwest end near Waterton park while along the eastern side it now stretches from High River in the northeast corner to just east of Fort Macleod in the southeast end, with the Waterton River being the new overall southern boundary.

Mr. Speaker, southwest Alberta is where the plains that provide choice farming and ranchland meet the foothills and the majestic eastern slopes before abruptly giving way to the Rocky Mountains. To the east there are vast open areas of croplands, and to the west there are some of the most majestic and beautiful panoramic views in Alberta that include the fabulous foothills and mountain vistas along with the Porcupine Hills, that are one of the few unglaciated hills in Alberta. This is a unique grazing environment with rough fescue grasslands on the lower slopes and tall, spiky Douglas fir trees on the ridges.

There are over 20 communities in the Livingstone-Macleod riding. The list in the southern quadrant includes Nanton, Stavely, Claresholm, Granum, Fort Macleod, Cowley, Pincher Creek, Lundbreck, plus the Crowsnest Pass communities of Frank, Bellevue, Hillcrest, Blairmore, and Coleman along with the MDs of Foothills and Ranchland, Willow Creek, Pincher Creek, and the Piikani reserve. Each of these communities and the overall area have a fabulous history, and there are numerous historical sites that may be toured throughout the region.

In the southwest corner, most notably, are the various locations in the Crowsnest Pass, where at the turn of the last century coal mining was at its peak. Coleman, Bellevue, and Leitch Collieries all have and are fine exhibits of mining operations that were prevalent in the area.

Unfortunately, as well there is the reality of that era in terms of several disasters in the mining industry along with several fires plus, of course, the horrible event that took place when Turtle Mountain collapsed on the town of Frank in 1903. This is

displayed at the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, and I would encourage all Albertans to take a moment to tour that facility there along with Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, that is just nearby.

Along the highway 2 corridor are the towns of Fort Macleod, where the first North West Mounted Police post was established in what was then the North-West Territories, along with Claresholm and Nanton, both of which are well known in historical terms for the flying service training school built in '41 to train British Commonwealth pilots and later in the '50s for training NATO airmen. Claresholm was also a significant CP Rail location. The railway brought settlers that raised cattle, grain, and carried crops to market, and it also brought coal from the mines and provided a means for soldiers to head off to war.

Looking to the northwest area of the new riding, where we have the community of Longview in the south and the hamlet of Priddis in the north, are several key communities, including Turner Valley, which, of course, is well known as the birthplace of Alberta's oil and gas industry. Beginning in 1914, for over 30 years Turner Valley was a major supplier of oil and gas and the largest producer at the time, actually, in the British Empire. Today, while there are still ongoing oil and gas activities in the general area, the former Turner Valley gas plant remains as a national historic site.

Nearby to Turner Valley is the town of Black Diamond, which is actually well known for its coal-mining days, which grew in size quickly as the entire area developed into quite a resource region overall. Also close by is the Eden Valley reserve and the historic Bar U Ranch, located near Longview, which at one time was comprised of approximately 147,000 acres of prime ranchland and is also a natural historic site viewed by thousands of people every year.

3:50

But today the area of Livingstone-Macleod is a thriving hub of agricultural activity primarily. While there's an immense amount of pressure on the region from the oil and gas industry, there are also several significant new industries, including motion picture production, which has brought the fabulous vistas of this riding to viewers throughout the world. As well, we also have the amazing wind energy business thriving down in the Pincher-Cowley wind corridor. As time moves forward, we must endeavour to create and maintain a balance between these new land uses, agriculture, and good stewardship of the land in this very majestic region. Indeed, while much work has been done in terms of preserving agricultural land and protecting natural areas, more must be accomplished in the future to guarantee that we are doing everything possible to protect our water sources, our air, our forests, our natural capital that we so much treasure in these fabulous viewsheds.

Further, however, we must at the same time ensure that we are carefully reviewing all new legislation to ensure that our landowner property rights are also protected. Over the course of the last couple of years hundreds of Albertans attended meetings throughout the province extremely concerned about the new land-use framework and the land-use bills, specifically bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. Hundreds of hours – literally hundreds of hours – were voluntarily contributed by concerned individuals, and thousands of miles were travelled by landowners and special-interest groups who sought to ensure that their voices were heard on these issues so that change could be made to these poorly conceived legislations. I will guarantee that their work will not have been for nothing. I will continue to carry their message to this government at every opportunity available to me.

In addition, the people of Livingstone-Macleod have brought to my attention the very serious need for upgrades to several seniors' facilities in Blairmore, Pincher Creek, and Claresholm, where some of the housing authority buildings, in fact, and mechanical equipment are in a very sad state and require immediate attention.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, I will bring again to the attention of this House that the decision to cancel the Alberta public security and law enforcement training centre at Fort Macleod was not only poorly conceived. It was done at the expense of 13 years of planning, consulting, and several millions of Albertans' tax dollars along with the future hopes and dreams and investments of the people who live and call the Fort Macleod area their home. This government must reimburse all of the stakeholders in this very sad and appalling decision regarding this issue and do so immediately, accompanied by an apology to all of those residents and stakeholders who so looked forward to this project being completed and operational.

As the representative for Livingstone-Macleod and as the sustainable resources critic for the Official Opposition in the next four years I intend to work as diligently as possible on these aforementioned issues, and I do so hand in hand with community leaders, special-interest groups, and other constituents toward those objectives.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, as the Livingstone-Macleod MLA I am proud to serve the residents of the riding and look forward to challenging my fellow members of this Assembly towards all of these very worthwhile goals.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family, and I'm particularly proud of the constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek, which I'm honoured to be representing. It's a great place to live, it's a great place to raise your family, it has great schools, it has great people, and I'm privileged to have Fish Creek provincial park right in my backyard. Not only is this place a great place to be, but the people that I serve are great people to serve.

Mr. Speaker, I take pride in knowing my community. I make a strong effort to genuinely listen to the concerns of my constituents. I try to make myself as approachable as possible, whether it's through phone calls, e-mails, attending events in the constituency, or just plain shopping for groceries. I want to hear from the people that I am honoured to represent, and I hear a lot of concerns about health care, about seniors, about education.

Mr. Speaker, it's a personal concern for me to be looking after my aging mother, who is not only my best friend but my biggest cheerleader. Every Sunday before I leave, she says: you go get those people. I spend a lot of time with seniors. My mom is in a seniors' facility. I've got lots of personal experience and lots of experience as the former Seniors critic.

One must ask how this government is treating our seniors today. Is it fair, Mr. Speaker, to nickel and dime our seniors to death? Do they honestly believe that one shower a week is fair? Do they honestly believe it's fair to charge seniors as you wheel them into the dining room? Do they honestly believe that it is fair to charge seniors for their medications? I love and respect the seniors in this riding and this province, and I think it's important that we take care of the seniors in this province.

It heartens me to be able to hand over my Seniors critic position to my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, who I know will take care of the seniors in this province. It's also my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to serve as the Health critic for the Wildrose caucus. Health care is the number one priority of Albertans, and it's my personal priority. Every single day I speak with concerned health professionals. Whether they're nurses, doctors, LPNs, or, for that matter, any health care professional, they work tirelessly every day on behalf of Albertans. I want to thank the front-line workers, who do the job that they do every day.

Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate this throne speech every year. This is an opportunity for the government to lay out the big picture for Albertans. The throne speech feels a lot like a New Year's resolution to me. I sometimes think that we should call the throne speech the happy throne speech. While it is a chance to start things afresh, it feels like the same words are repeated over and over year after year. We hear every year about the importance of health care and education and fiscal responsibility. These are bedrock Alberta values. But where is the plan? Where is the progress? Where are the results?

We also get a strong sense of whom the government has been talking with and whom they have been listening to. Mr. Speaker, sometimes they are not the same thing. We have a lot of consultation going on in this province and a lot of conversation. Sadly, the important conversation doesn't seem to be in the community but in the Premier's office. This is sad to me because I believe in genuine conversation from bottom to top and back again. A sincere conversation is not just talking and listening. It also involves compromise. Otherwise, the conversation is just a lecture from the top to the bottom. Our system is a democracy, not some lower form based on the power of one person.

Mr. Speaker, this is in large part why I crossed the floor from the government caucus to the Wildrose caucus. To say the least, crossing the floor was one of the most difficult decisions in my life. Oh, what a journey that was. Two and a half years later, coming onto three, I still get emotional about the issue and still remember a lot of things that were done in making that decision to cross the floor. The year before I crossed the floor, I door-knocked from May to October. The constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek made it very clear that they didn't like what was happening in government. I didn't like it either. One must make a decision on what is the right thing on behalf of the people that you're elected to serve.

Too often politics seem to be about ideology or the battle of the day in the media. Politics are also about personal relationships, how you treat people and how you are treated.

4:00

Respect is everything you need to know about a person. It turned out a lot of people in my social world only cared about power. They cared about the perks of the job and future perks as well. I can say that many of the people I've worked with in this government respected my decisions. My constituents did. They re-elected me to represent them in Calgary-Fish Creek to fight for their values, our principles, our priorities, and I will continue to do that as an MLA.

Not only have I had the honour of being an MLA, I've also had the honour of being a cabinet minister in the past. I had the privilege of sitting at the table of a true leader, a leader that listened to what his caucus and what his cabinet had to say. He provided leadership and direction, not marching orders.

After I left cabinet, I continued to proudly serve the public interest. I started to feel that something was missing in Alberta and in our government. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say that I've

found that feeling again. I feel re-energized under my current leader in the Official Opposition. We have a leader who listens, forges a consensus, and drives forward. There are no marching orders that drive us, just the will of our caucus and our constituents.

We take the time to connect with our constituents and people from all over the province that don't feel that they're being listened to. We don't need travelling road shows to show we're listening. We pick up the phone and we ask. We know what the priorities of Albertans are. We need health care available when we need it. We need more beds for our seniors in the community, not just stuck in some hospital ward. We need surgical suites up and running so we can get that knee and hip replacement in good time, not in eight months. We need schools in our community that are open and in good repair with the tools available to thrive. We need safe roads and highways, not excuses and not new laws. These are the issues we will drive forward as an Official Opposition.

The health issues are what I will fight for in the Legislature for the patients, for the health professions, for all Albertans. We hear from the government on a regular basis how things are pretty good, but pretty good isn't enough, Mr. Speaker. We need to give credit where credit is due, and that's to the hard work of our health care professionals at the front line.

My policy, especially when I was a minister, was that if you want to know the best way to do things, you should consult with those who are actually doing them. I don't believe that it's happening anymore. I hear every day from the doctors, the nurses, and other health care professionals begging for the government to listen. The tired solution for them is to spend more money, and we know that doesn't work. It has been tried for years, and we're no further ahead. To hear from experts, we're actually worse off. That's why now the government has been backtracking its mistake since AHS was created. After years of tuning out Albertans, we finally – finally – might see a return to local decision-making. Better late than never, I suppose, Mr. Speaker, and let's get it right this time.

We're here to advocate for the right dollars in the right place, the right care at the right time. We need better management of our precious health care system. The health professionals know it's not about how it is being spent but about where it's going to be spent. We need results to know what we're doing. There is a lot of money in the system, but somehow it doesn't flow to the front lines. In the last few years we've seen bonuses paid to AHS executives, yet we've seen nurses laid off and then hired back again. How can we see hiring freezes on all staff at the same time as lavish expense accounts and bonuses for our executive? It just doesn't make sense for me or the front-line staff or Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great province. I'm proud to say I'm an Albertan. I'm proud to stand here in the Legislature as an MLA representing the people of Calgary-Fish Creek. I'm so honoured to be able to serve and do what they want.

I'm proud to be a member of the Official Opposition. I'm proud to be the Health critic, fighting on behalf of the health care professionals who work tirelessly on behalf of Albertans. I'm proud to work with my staff every day. I'm proud of every single one of my colleagues. And, lastly, I'm proud to be a wife and a mother.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am a husband and a father and a Wildrose legislative member for the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. My name is Rick Strankman, and I kind of remember it in that order.

On April 23 I began a historic journey with all of you here today. From a young age politics has always been a source of interest to me. As far back as high school my classmates to this day remind me of how I thrived on discussing controversial issues. Some 40 years later I stand before you with the trust of the people from Drumheller-Stettler, with the opportunity to represent them in this Legislature to the very best of my ability. I am truly humbled by this honour.

Adventure, freedom, and democracy have always been instrumental in my activism that has naturally taken me to this political ring. My wonderful wife of 33 years, Dianne, and I have strived to instill these values in our two children, Pamela and Jay, whom my wife and I cherish.

Following high school I proceeded to immerse myself in the family farm. Ranching also has been a part of the family and is something many Albertans are very proud of. I share that sense of pride and accomplishment with all of them as well as with some 20 other families that celebrated 100 years of living in the adverse area now known as the special areas. Agriculture and ranching have always been a very vital part of the Alberta lifestyle and our economic well-being, and it's also a part of our very identity.

Many years ago I expanded my personal skill set by pursuing my pilot's licence. Flying has also been a source of relaxation, if you can believe that, and adventure and has served as a great means to meet people throughout Alberta and my constituency. The many personal contacts that I have made during my aerial application exploits have resulted in many lifelong friends that I hold very near and dear to my heart. I'd like to say, sir, that there is only one guy who knows where I've been with that ag plane.

The days leading up to April 23 were also very special and something that I will always remember with great appreciation. The people that helped with my campaign gave of themselves selflessly to create a better Alberta. They are my heroes.

The people of Drumheller-Stettler have always been long-time stalwarts of Alberta and of Canada. They are the very fabric of rural society and the values of Alberta. The constituency has many small businesses, working professionals, farmers, ranchers, and a thriving oil and gas industry over a vast area.

Drumheller-Stettler consists of a vast land mass and is very diverse, with both urban and rural areas that require diverse leadership and guidance. The larger towns in the area are comprised of Hanna, Stettler, and Drumheller, with the rest of the population being made up of smaller hamlets and villages. Those smaller centres serve as a hub to those living in more rural locations. With an electorate of 23,000 and a population of over 33,000 people spread throughout this expansive riding, my challenge will be to be available and responsive, to be there for their very needs and to do that to the best of my ability.

The Drumheller valley boasts some of the most beautiful scenery found anywhere on Earth. The Royal Tyrrell Museum has taken its place as one of the great museums of the world. A world-class museum set against the backdrop of world-class scenery, it is a must-see destination, and I highly recommend it to anyone.

The increasingly popular *Canadian Badlands Passion Play*, that is performed in a natural amphitheatre that actually exists within the Drumheller townsite, is as authentic as it is entertaining. I had the privilege to attend a performance this past July with my wife.

4:10

Stettler also is a true Alberta town. It is the heart of Alberta and the home to a classic steam train, owned by Alberta Prairie Railway Excursions, that was founded back in 1990 and is one of Alberta and Canada's top tourist attractions. Over the last 20 years more than 350,000 people from all over the world, across Canada, and around Alberta have come to Stettler to board the train for the 67-kilometre round trip that takes the riders to the Big Valley station, also within this riding. The trip is complete with some horse-mounted gunmen to revisit the history of this province. You might appreciate that, Mr. Donovan. The heart that beats in Stettler is that of a very healthy business centre with an active and diverse community.

The town of Hanna is located near the centre of the constituency, a very special place with a fantastic championship golf course that challenges even the most seasoned golfer. Hanna serves as the centre of a large trading area in my constituency known as the special areas. Hanna is known as the home to the internationally acclaimed and award-winning rock band Nickelback. The band has also remembered their hometown and even shot their *Photograph* music video in and around Hanna, their story of growing up on the prairies. I might take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to ad lib that the grandfather of the Nickelback Kroeger boys was MLA Henry Kroeger, whom I knew and did business with in my early years as a farmer.

The special areas is an area that requires a certain type of people, people that know what it takes to manage crops and resources in a fragile, diverse, adverse environment. I am dedicated to the protection of the special areas from the drastic changes that may jeopardize this legacy of success. The special areas is my home, always has been my home, and will be my home. It has always been my view that the people of Drumheller-Stettler view their environment as a place of positive potential and feel a need to protect that environment from harm. I share that need to protect our environment with them.

It is almost as if the environmental stability of Drumheller-Stettler recently has come under attack by Alberta's own government. The situation taking place at the Berry Creek reservoir has seen the water critical to the irrigation needs of two dozen farm families evaporate or disappear through mismanagement and, along with it, the possibility of several crops for the next two years. The fish stock in the reservoir, that boasted a record pike being caught last year, will also take many years to repair.

A short distance away there is another situation that took place with the removal of nests that were used by the ferruginous hawk population in the Bullpound pasture area. The ferruginous hawk is the largest species of hawk in North America and is currently listed as endangered or threatened in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, my experiences with my activism culminated in Kindersley, Saskatchewan, on August 1 this past summer, when Prime Minister Harper announced that my comrades and I were pardoned for the consequences that resulted from fighting the unjust monopoly that was held by the Canadian Wheat Board until that day. August 1 of this year saw the history of western Canadian farming change for the better and finally saw free enterprise come to prairie farmers. The long road I travelled with 12 other activists who put it on the line alongside me taught me something very important. We can make real changes. We just have to have the resolve to do it. We changed the policy of a country.

From the time we are three years old, we all know right from wrong. That's what Wildrose is about, doing the right thing. We

just have to have that resolve. It is incumbent upon me to represent the best interests and the wishes of the people of Drumheller-Stettler, and I will do everything within my abilities to live up to this honour. I stand before you with no particular malice to anyone, and I look forward to working with all members of this Assembly in the days ahead to preserve and protect our way of life for all Albertans.

I would like to say a special thank you to my Wildrose CA board, that did amazing work before and during the election. I'd also like to thank my fellow elected Wildrose comrades, that I will be sharing this prestigious and, I might add, historic journey with for their support and encouragement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the honour of addressing this Legislature today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move adjournment for this session.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Before I accept that motion, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I personally want to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler and commend him for his guts in standing up to the Canadian Wheat Board and his unselfish willingness to defend what is right for farmers in western Canada. Thank you, member.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you like to respond, hon. member?

Mr. Strankman: No, sir. I think it goes without saying.

I would like to make a comment, though, if I could, to the member opposite, Mr. Horner, the Minister of Finance . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we refer to the office, not the member.

Mr. Strankman: . . . the Minister of Finance, sir, for his part also in helping achieve the freedom on the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe I heard a motion from the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler to adjourn debate on His Honour's speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 3

Education Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government of Alberta I'm very pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 3, the Education Act.

This legislation is the result of years of discussion, consultation, and debate on the future of Alberta's education system. We've spoken with students and their parents, teachers, support staff, school administrators, school board trustees, superintendents, community, and business representatives. The result of this province-wide conversation is the legislation that I'm confident all Albertans will be proud of.

I'd like to point out that we have members of the Public School Boards' Association in the gallery today to take in this momentous occasion.

While I have the honour of speaking to it today, no one person can take credit for this act. This has been the result of years of work. If any one person deserves credit, it's our Minister of Human Services, who spent years of his life developing the foundation and most of the body of this legislation. It was truly a shared effort. Tens of thousands of Albertans have made this act what it is today. In fact, it's the result of one of the most far-reaching consultations in Alberta's history.

Albertans are passionate about education, and they should be because our kids deserve the best education system we can give them. The Education Act is a vision for our education system built by Albertans for Albertans. I'm proud of it. In my time as a co-chair of the Inspiring Education steering committee I was involved in discussions with thousands of Albertans over a period of two years about the future of our education system. As a father with three children in school I was very interested in the future of the education system in our province. It was timely that we were talking about what an educated Albertan looks like in 2030 or a kid entering our system in 2009. As a matter of fact, my daughter was entering the system in 2009.

I'm happy to say that what people told us in Inspiring Education was that we need to put students first. I believe that Bill 3 embodies that philosophy. This act does many things. There are many details to go over, but there are three main themes of this bill. One is that it contains very strong language about and commitment to respecting diversity and creating welcome, safe, respectful school environments. It empowers school boards to make local decisions, and it affirms the important role the family plays as the primary educator of their children. Even changes to administrative responsibilities can be tied back to putting students first. An example of this is the natural person powers. This is a change in response to requests from school boards. They want to be more responsive to their local needs, and they want us to remove the barriers for them to do that.

I would now like to go through some of the highlights of Bill 3, and the first feature I'd like to highlight is the roles and responsibilities. Education is a shared responsibility. It requires collaboration, engagement, and empowerment of all partners in the system. These partners include parents, students, school boards and trustees, and others in the community. By outlining the roles and responsibilities of participants in our education system, Bill 3 acknowledges that active engagement is crucial for student success. An example of school boards' responsibility is to partner with postsecondary institutions and the community to help students transition to postsecondary education. Responsibilities for parents and students include helping to maintain a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment.

4:20

This morning I had the chance to participate in We Day, which is happening, well, not right now anymore but earlier today in Calgary. We Day is a gathering of thousands of Alberta students, 16,000 to be exact, and is a celebration of the power of youth to make a positive impact on the world. It was an incredible event that 600 of our schools took part in, with a waiting list of another 500 schools. These students that attended and others that weren't able to be there have embraced their role in making their communities and the world a better place. By including the responsibility to help schools be welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe in Bill 3, we are acknowledging that students are able and willing and expected to be a positive force in the world. From

what I saw at We Day this morning, I know that they are more than capable of doing so.

As parents we also share that responsibility. Bill 3 acknowledges parents as the primary guides and decision-makers with respect to their child's education. The language we have in the bill is directly out of Inspiring Education, widely accepted around Alberta, and directly out of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. The Education Act is the first legislation in Canada to formally recognize the essential role of parents as a child's first and important teacher. This means parents must have the tools they need to make decisions in the best interests of their children. This includes the right to be kept informed about the education of their children by those who have information to share: teachers, administrators, the board, and government. By clearly outlining these roles and responsibilities, the Education Act emphasizes that for our education system to stay successful, everyone involved must play their part.

Another way we are encouraging student success is through changes to age of access and compulsory attendance. Students will now have access to provincially funded high school education until they turn 21. The Education Act also raises compulsory attendance from 16 to 17. Both of these changes demonstrate the importance that Albertans place on education and on continuing education. They will encourage students to complete high school. Improving our high school completion rates is important as we plan for the future of this province. Expanding educational opportunities for students will result in greater social and economic success for both the students and for the entire province of Alberta.

As I've mentioned, all aspects of the Education Act are focused on student success, and to be successful, they need to feel safe. The legislation makes it clear that students must feel free from physical and emotional harm and that bullying is not accepted under any circumstances, not by students, teachers, or anyone else in the school community, not ever, no exceptions. In fact, I'm proud to say that the Education Act features some of the strongest antibullying legislation in the country.

Bill 3 acknowledges that bullying behaviour can happen anywhere, especially in a world dominated by technology. Bullying that occurs outside the school grounds can nonetheless affect the school environment; therefore, we have clarified our expectations regarding how school boards should deal with this type of bullying because every child needs to feel safe. We didn't include specific groups of children in the act or specify things that kids can't be bullied about because an inclusive system means every kid gets support, every student, every time, every kid celebrated, no bullying tolerated.

Next I'd like to move on to a few of the items with respect to governance and co-operation, Mr. Speaker. While these changes are administrative, they are also focused on responding to local needs and encouraging student success. One such change is regarding the separate school establishment process. This change includes broader community involvement and engagement in the establishment of separate school districts.

The Education Act also allows separate school electorates to choose which jurisdiction, public or separate, they want to vote in or run in for election as a trustee. This creates a more democratic procedure while continuing to support constitutionally protected minority rights. It provides a good balance and is in response to what we've heard from Albertans. In that vein, we've also made some changes regarding francophone electors. They will no longer need to have a child enrolled in a school operated by a francophone regional authority to vote or to run for election as a trustee. This change was developed with direct input from the francophone community.

Bill 3 includes several more governance changes which will maintain choice for Alberta families, and these include changes to charter and private schools as well as composite board establishment. Charter and private schools continue to be a part of the broad range of educational choices for parents and students in Alberta's education system. The Education Act provides criteria for the establishment of a charter school. It clarifies that only societies or nonprofit companies may establish a charter school. The act also ensures that students in private schools continue to receive sound educational programming by defining actions the minister may take regarding the financial viability of a private school.

Finally, Bill 3 also allows for the creation of composite boards comprised of public and separate school divisions but only on the request of those districts.

Another way we're working towards an improved system, Mr. Speaker, is through changes to the administrative and financial responsibilities of school boards. An example of this is the natural person powers, which I spoke of earlier, but Bill 3 also provides the minister with powers to direct school boards to co-operate with each other to provide transportation services. This may provide Albertans with a better return on investment for the transportation funding provided to boards.

School boards will also be required to establish an audit committee. This will enhance Albertans' confidence in our investment in our education system and in it being used effectively. Albertans want our education system to be well funded, and it is. However, they also want to see the results of that investment and as much of that investment go directly to the students and their instruction as possible. If school fees are being charged, they want to know why. Therefore, the Education Act contains a commitment to develop regulations which will review how boards determine school fees, how school fees are communicated, and policies around waivers. This will be part of the regulations review that will follow the Education Act being signed into law.

Once it's passed, a review of regulations and policies will be required. This alignment of regulations and policies will ensure a successful transition and strengthening of Alberta's education system for the future. As we have throughout the creation of the Education Act, we will seek input from Albertans, and we will develop and revise the regulations.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the new Education Act is a significant step forward. It brings to life the vision for the future of education that thousands of Albertans shared with us through Inspiring Education, setting the direction, Speak Out, and other public consultations. I'm proud that the new Education Act is built on the foundation that parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community are all important partners in the education system. I sincerely hope that you will join me in supporting this foundational piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, just for procedure, just to let you know, the next speaker will have 20 minutes, and then the next additional speaker will have 15 minutes, with Standing Order 29(2)(a) applying after those.

At this time I will recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with some degree of satisfaction that I rise today to speak to Bill 3, the Education Act. I sincerely hope the third time is the charm. This is the third time

this bill has been presented to this Legislature for debate. Bill 18, of course, and I think we all remember Bill 2, and now we're looking at the third time coming in.

I would say that we do give general support to this bill. You've already heard the hon. Member for Airdrie and the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View speak in general terms about how we can support this bill, but I will take some reservation. I am worried that we are already off to a bad start on this bill, a 188-page bill that was delivered to us yesterday, and now we're already in a position where we're debating it less than 24 hours later. This is not a very good start and not really in keeping, I think, with the new tone we're trying to set in the Legislature.

I would certainly hope that the hon. members on the other side would appreciate that even though we are generally speaking in favour of it today, we have observed that from time to time with such large documents there are clauses in there that do cause some consternation to the stakeholders. So do keep in mind that I reserve the right to come back at some future point when we've talked to stakeholders to see whether or not all of the issues that we might have with this bill have been addressed. But I will say that we do have general support.

4:30

Let me return to a couple of the issues that were raised in the spring Legislature that we feel have been largely addressed in this new and improved version of this bill. First of all, the great controversy arose because of the addition of Alberta Human Rights Act provisions to the Education Act and in particular to home-school families. I know that the members of the other opposition parties have expressed concern about the exclusion of this in applying to home-school families, and I know that they have raised concerns about Bill 44. I would acknowledge that there aren't any teachers that have been hauled before the Human Rights Commission under the provisions of Bill 44, but there are religious leaders who have been hauled before the Human Rights Commission. I'll mention Bishop Fred Henry, and I'll mention Reverend Stephen Boissin.

This is part of the reason why we were encouraged by the Premier's commitment to remove section 3 from the human rights code so that we could restore free speech, restore freedom of religion. In the absence of the Premier keeping that commitment, it's quite clear that we could not have the Education Act include this provision and potentially have home-school families hauled before the Human Rights Commission for teaching their children the tenets of the faith throughout the course of a school day. So we're very pleased that the government recognized that this was an affront to the religious freedom and religious rights of our home-school families and that they have addressed this in this legislation.

The second thing I would say is that I do believe that the government did hear the lesson loud and clear on the steps of the Legislature when I stood along with the hon. Member for Airdrie before 2,000 home-school families and their children, who had come to protest to the previous Education minister to let him know their displeasure. It's very clear to me that because of this activism on the part of these grassroots parents the government had no choice but to respond.

Also having I think it was three full days of filibuster from the then hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere probably had something to do as well with the fact that that bill did not pass in the spring session and was able over the course of the last few months to undergo a substantial rewrite. I would say that in many ways our Wildrose members are very pleased that we have had such an incredible

influence on the outcome of this bill, which is why once again I think we can speak generally in support of it.

One of the things I would say about education in this province, and this goes back to the legacy of a former Premier, Premier Klein, is that when I went to the Preston Manning conference in February of 2010, they talked about the ways in which this government should be assessed on its performance in a whole range of different policy areas. For the most part the government was getting Ds and Fs, but in the area of education the group there assembled – most of us were conservatives – scored the government a B plus in education. It was because of the actions taken in the 1990s to give parental choice, to acknowledge that parents have a right to choose the kind of education that they want for their children, to allow for public schools, to allow for vibrant Catholic schools, to allow for charter schools, home-schooling, virtual schooling. This has made Alberta's education system responsive to parents, and that is the one thing that we have to preserve, not only to ensure that parental rights are acknowledged and recognized but to ensure that children get the best education that their parents choose for them.

There are still a few concerns, though, that we are likely to bring forward some minor amendments from. We may bring forward more, but there are three that we are concerned about right now. First of all, on the issue of charter schools: I believe that the reform efforts that began with charter schools have somewhat stalled, and that's unfortunate because many of the charter schools in this province have not only earned an incredible amount of recognition outside the province but, of course, also the support of the parents who send their children to those schools.

I take a little bit of pleasure in the fact that there is a left-wing progressive blogger named Donald Gutstein who blames me in part for bringing charter schools to Alberta because of a column that I wrote with scholar Fazil Mihlar when I was an intern at the Fraser Institute talking about how important charter schools were to give that amount of parental rights and that amount of choice in programs to a variety of children and how good it would be for Alberta to go down that path.

I'm glad that we're looking at the issue of charter schools, and I'm hopeful that we can make some amendments to re-embrace the original vision of what charter schools were supposed to mean in this province.

Secondly, on the issue of Catholic education, I think we recall that in the dying days of Bill 2, when it was quite clear it was not going to pass, the Catholic school trustees were very alarmed at the potential provisions that would force an end to Catholic education or at least an end to their autonomy. We were pleased to see that much of the language that was offensive to the Catholic school trustees has been removed. I myself am a student of both public education and Catholic education. I went back and forth between the two. I graduated from the same high school as the hon. Premier, Bishop Carroll high school in Calgary. My brother sends his children to Catholic education.

The fact that my family has always had the option of two fully publicly funded school boards, major school boards in major cities, has been something that my family has valued, and I think all families deserve to be able to continue to have that choice. The language that would have forced those boards together – I've talked to the superintendent in my area for the Christ the Redeemer school. He's read through at least half of the act. He wasn't able to get through all 188 pages either by the time I spoke with him, but he's assured me that what he's seeing he also likes. We'll do some more consultation with our Catholic stakeholders just to make sure that all of those provisions are taken out that were offensive to them, but I think that this is an important

principle for us to support, that we do have two strong public school systems. One is a public board; the other is a separate board. We want to be able to maintain that autonomy because it does give additional choice in education as well as being able to provide the full funding.

The third area I would raise is the issue of covering education up to age 21. I think we all recognize that we want to be able to encourage those who have not been able to finish the school program within the usual time frame and give them the opportunity to go back to school. The thing that we are concerned about, though, is that there may be integrated classrooms with some of these older young adults, 21 years old, being in the same classrooms as younger people. You can well imagine, as we're dealing with issues of bullying, as we're dealing with issues of sexual assaults or any potential problems that we might have along those lines, that when you put groups of people together with that great age difference there is the potential, I think, for parents to be concerned that there are going to be problems.

We want to make sure that when we're implementing this age limit that we do have opportunities for those older young adults to be segregated from the younger population so that we don't end up creating any additional problems of integrating children who are not of the same maturity level and certainly should not be socializing in the same way. There are some great models for this in my own riding, for instance. The Christ the Redeemer school division has St. Luke's school, which does an outreach program. We also have a distance learning program in many of our schools that provides the opportunity for older students to be able to return. I think the main barrier that we're trying to eliminate here is the cost barrier of kids being able to return to school. I hope that we put a little bit more clarity around that, maybe if not in the legislation then certainly in the regulations so that we can avoid any future problems.

The last area I would mention – and this is an area that was raised with me as I was travelling around the province talking to our First Nations leaders – is that they are very disappointed that they were not consulted in the process of developing this legislation. One of the things that we have to be aware of is that our aboriginal students do follow the Alberta curriculum. They will follow Alberta law. But they do get funded by our federal counterparts, and our federal counterparts are not paying for these students to go to school up to age 21. If we're imposing upon our aboriginal communities this extra requirement that they go to school, where is the money going to come from? I think that this is a piece that we have to be talking about with our federal counterparts to make sure the funding flows through.

While I'm talking about this, I would say that our First Nations communities have told me that the funding currently for education is inadequate. In many communities they're getting \$5,500 per student. If those students go off-reserve to a nonreserve school, the school board is charging them \$9,000 to \$10,000 to \$11,000. There's a shortfall there. I would say that this should be a priority. If we're going to be discussing with our federal counterparts how we might be able to raise the revenue to be able to have children funded all the way up to age 21 on our reserves, then I think we also should add this additional component. How do we make sure that we've got an adequate level of funding flowing through to the reserve so that every aboriginal student gets the same high quality of education that we're able to provide to nonreserve students?

Those are the areas that we're going to be taking a closer look at. Once again, I'm pleased that the government did listen to the public, did listen to parents, did listen to the home-school families, did listen to the Catholic school trustees, and did make the revisions that the Wildrose caucus had been calling for in the

previous spring election. We are delighted to acknowledge that we will be making some minor changes, but we do think that this is a significant improvement. We do look forward to working with the government to improve the bill and enact the changes, which we know are going to have many positive impacts on Alberta's students, parents, and teachers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I will recognize the next speaker and remind you that after each subsequent speaker from here on, Standing Order 29(2)(a) will apply.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this piece of legislation. I believe it's my third opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading since this is our third shot at it. So we'll see how this one goes compared to previous ones.

You know, this Education Act is a long-awaited piece of legislation. There's no question that a great deal of work has gone into it and that there has been quite a significant amount of consultation. How can you not, over the course of three attempts to introduce it?

There are many good pieces in the legislation, and I'd like to start by just talking briefly about some of those things which I think are positive additions to our Education Act through this piece of legislation. Then, unfortunately, I'll end by outlining some of the areas that we think need to be improved and some of the items which I think are somewhat disappointing to Albertans as a result of their inclusion or, in this case, their omission.

Some of the things that the act did do which I think are important: one of the first things I see is that we are looking at doing things like raising the age of access to 21 years. That was a positive improvement in terms of ensuring that students have every opportunity to complete their education. That is a reasonable improvement.

We were certainly also happy to see that the government accepted a couple of the amendments that were put forward by members of the opposition. One of the ones that we outlined was an amendment to have the process by which charter schools are established remain the same and that it not be expanded so that we end up with a proliferation of charter schools throughout the province or, alternatively, that we end up with a situation where we have, you know, Walmart opening up a charter school just because it might be a way to help market some of their stuff. I know that that was certainly never the intention of the government when the original legislation came forward, and it just happened to be the case that the language they used might have allowed for it. As a result, we are pleased to see that those types of loopholes and that kind of language were changed. So that was certainly good.

I think that, generally speaking, there have been some reasonably good improvements to the legislation that, without question, respond to issues that have been raised by many of the stakeholders and particularly by some of the school board associations and the Public School Boards' Association.

Having said that, as you know, this bill did not pass last time because there was a great deal of controversy over certain elements of it. I would like to say that we are very disappointed that the government has responded to the controversy in the way that it has. There is no question that our colleagues in the Wildrose and some of our colleagues in the government caucus took on this particular issue, but I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the

outcome that we see reflected in this Education Act reflects a capitulation, and it reflects a failure to respect the paramountcy of our Human Rights Act and the concept of human rights in this province. So I'm very, very disappointed in the way that that failure has found its way into this piece of legislation.

Now, there were a number of people – and the Official Opposition leader talked about the many demonstrators that were here in front of this Legislature last spring. There's no question that there was a lot of passion within that particular community about the previous language in I believe it was section 16 of the last version of this act. At the time it struck me as a tempest in a teapot because, really, the import of that language was not what those people suggested it was, the notion that parents would be hauled in front of the Human Rights Commission and all that kind of stuff. It was not a correct interpretation of what that language meant. It was simply a statement of principle, and it actually had no legal force and effect, so it really was quite a tempest in a teapot that everybody got themselves really wrapped up over.

What is concerning to me: while that was meaningless, its inclusion, the subsequent decision of the government to remove reference to our human rights code and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms from the act is in itself significant because it represents the capitulation to the notion that somehow our Education Act and our schools, which are authorized in our education system, which are a function of this province and of our community, cannot talk about the human rights code in our education system, that somehow that's a sensitive topic, that we need to look down and not make eye contact over it because it might offend somebody if we talk about notions of equality and diversity. It's very, very disappointing that the government has capitulated in that way. That's all I will say on that.

Now, on the other hand, the government has spent a lot of time talking about its bullying legislation and the element of this act around bullying. While I appreciate the sentiment behind talking about it and raising awareness and everybody sharing their general sense of concern about the issue, I will say to you that the language in this act is not really the solution to the bullying problem. Certainly, the combination of this act and the amended human rights code, which truly is a licence for bullying, you know, will ensure that substantive efforts to reduce bullying in some cases will actually be muted or discouraged by the legislative framework, that this government has over the course of two, three years, with the introduction of this act and the amendment to the human rights code, actually undermined efforts to reduce bullying.

I also want to talk about, really, the nuts and bolts of: how do we deal with bullying in our schools? We do really all care about that, and I do believe we all are genuinely concerned about this issue. I think many of us or most of us were concerned about it long before the very tragic events that occurred with respect to Amanda Todd in B.C. We've all known that it's a long-standing problem.

What I would say to you, having been in the system as a parent and having been in the system as an advocate and as someone who has met with teachers and special-needs assistants and parents of children with disabilities and parents on student councils, the way you get at bullying is that you do not put 30 kids into the same classroom, a third of whom actually need special-needs support, and put one teacher in there and pull out the aides and then expect everyone to get along and then at lunchtime open the doors, kick them out onto the playground, and don't send anybody out there to model and/or enforce good behaviour because you can't afford to have anybody out there. That's not how you stop bullying. Quite

the opposite. That is how you engender bullying. That's how you make sure it happens.

If you create stress in the classroom because those kids who are potential victims of bullying and also potential perpetrators of bullying are unable to get the support that they need in those classrooms and then you make the classrooms too big and then you cut resources to school boards and to schools so that they can't pay for people to be on the playground to monitor the activity that occurs on that playground, you're going to get bullying.

There's nothing in this act that stops that. There's nothing in the act that addresses that. The principal can have all the legal obligations he wants, but if he can't afford to create an environment in the classroom that addresses people's diverse needs and models appropriate behaviour on the playground and in the classroom and ensures that there is no stress within that classroom, if that principal, he or she, cannot create that environment, that principal is not going to be able to deal with the bullying.

4:50

What happens is that it turns into a triage dynamic in the schools. I've met with principals and teachers, and they will say: "We're triaging right now. I've got a kid here who should have a full-time special-needs assistant. I've got another kid here who actually needs three hours a day of one-on-one assistance in this one particular area. That's what I'm dealing with. Over there I see a kid that looks a bit like a victim, and I do see a dynamic where there's bullying starting to happen. You know what? God bless, I don't have time to do anything about it. I'm one principal. And you know what? I don't have enough teachers, and I don't have enough staff, and I don't have enough other people to be able to get in there and stop that bullying before it happens. I'm doing triage with the 12-year-old kid who hasn't learned to read yet because for the last three years he or she has not had the special-needs support that they should have gotten many, many years before."

That is happening more and more, Mr. Speaker, in our schools because overall we are funding less in terms of the special-needs populations in our schools. Whether you're talking about new immigrants, whether you're talking about the aboriginal population, whether you're talking about special-needs children, some of whom may have once been coded, some of whom are no longer coded, it doesn't matter. When you look at the absolute population of those people and you look at the resources that have been dedicated to special-needs funding in our schools, the fact of the matter is that it has gone down substantially, and the safety and the security and the diversity and the welcoming nature of our classrooms has deteriorated as a result.

We can make all the motherhood and apple pie statements that we want around bullying, but until such time as we are prepared to properly resource our schools so that the professionals and the parents and the kids who are in those school systems have the resources necessary to actually deal with bullying, then it is nothing more than smoke and mirrors, it's nothing more than a website, and it won't bring about a change.

To me, that's truly one of the most important pieces that needs to be discussed in this act because I cannot emphasize enough how, both anecdotally and statistically, we have seen the level of support given to kids who are vulnerable in our schools drop over the course of the last five or six years.

It is a travesty in a province that's supposed to be the richest province in the country, in a province where we're supposed to be, you know, hand over fist with money and where there's absolutely

no need to ever consider our revenue streams, to ever consider making the wealthy pay a little bit more, to ever consider making oil companies pay a little bit more in royalties. No need to do that because it's all okely-dokely here in Alberta, and there is nothing that we need in our system because we're doing everything just so.

Well, the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that that's not the case, and this Education Act, notwithstanding the effort that went into writing it, is not going to change that. It will not change that, and it will not change the vulnerability and the risk that a growing number of our kids in this province are facing when they go to school every day because we're not addressing the resources required to provide a truly equal education to every student. Not just that middle, average student or that most intelligent student that's going to cope and survive and succeed no matter what the circumstances are because that kid is a coper and he or she is really smart, but I'm talking about those other kids that actually need a well-funded, thoughtful education system to be able to make sure that we all move forward and succeed. That's what's being left behind in our education system right now.

We talked about, you know, the whole issue of asking school boards to ensure that they develop policies that work against bullying. The Edmonton public school board developed first in the country – or I think it was maybe the second in the country, first in the province and maybe second in the country – a very progressive policy about inclusions and acceptance of children and, actually, staff members with different sexual orientations. It was a leading document, a leading policy.

The fact of the matter is that between this piece of legislation and the human rights code, it's not entirely sure how effectively they are going to be able to implement that policy because there are so many tools now at the disposal of certain parents who do not support those values to interfere with the sharing of those values throughout our public school system. That is a concern.

I think I'm coming close to the end of my time. I look forward to further debate over the course of the next few days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a question for this member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I too share your sentiments when you said that it was a tempest in a teapot, that the Human Rights Act being included in the act was going to somehow have, I guess, people march into homes and separate parents and families and the like. I think that giving a little more explanation to members of this House on how actually a human rights complaint would be lodged and the circumstances by which it may happen, in order to have that happen, may help some members here and alleviate their fears of how that would actually happen, how the complaint process works at human rights, who would have to lodge the complaint, et cetera, et cetera. If you could help us with that, that would be worth it, in my view.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Just a reminder that we speak to the chair.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to respond.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. There's no question that the previous legislation simply talked about recognizing the principles of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the human rights code. As, you know, we debated at great length in the last session, the fact of the matter is that it is not possible for one piece of legislation to

change the application of another piece of legislation. The fact of the matter was that it was always only ever a statement in principle.

The ability of people to file claims under the human rights code, either about parents or teachers or anything, is exactly as it was before, with or without this language in the Education Act because it's a function of how the human rights code itself is constructed, and it's a function of how that human rights code is enforced. That language in the Education Act had no impact on that. It didn't then; it doesn't now. What we have now is simply the spectre of this government refusing to include reference to the human rights code in our Education Act, notwithstanding, as I said last night, that it happened to be Bill 1, the first bill introduced by former Premier Lougheed, a flagship bill that was to define the progressive in Progressive Conservative. Well, clearly, we've lost that in this Conservative Party, and we're now doing everything we can to mimic the cousins in Ottawa.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? There's still some time remaining.

With that, then, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege, as always, to get up and speak on any bill but in particular on the Education Act, and it is the third time I've had the pleasure to do so. The timing is that it's time this bill gets passed although I do have some reservations about the bill that I will discuss and make amendments on when it comes time.

I will start by noting some of the positives. I do understand that the current Minister of Human Services, the former Deputy Premier, and now the current minister have worked long and hard in putting this bill together, and I will recognize before my comments that it's not always easy to appease and put together an education system that works for everybody. However, with those being my comments, I will still offer some of the positive aspects as well as the criticism, with those foregoing statements having been said, nonetheless, for the record.

If we look at the proposed education bill, I enjoy not only the philosophical sentiment but the actual sentiment of increasing the right to at least K to 12 education to be accomplished until you're 21.

5:00

Given the framework of modern society, young adults maybe going into the workforce at a younger age, some people running with the wrong crowd or the like, we should extend every opportunity to children to finish high school. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that if you don't finish high school, not only do that individual person's chances of economic success diminish greatly, but the chances of that person becoming in fact involved in crime, involved in social welfare services and the like increase twofold or threefold. So I believe this goes a long way in trying to recognize a problem that is not only in our society but in many societies. It also recognizes that Alberta does have many attractive opportunities economically for people at a young age, and this allows them, maybe, to go back and finish their education.

I also like that they increased the age of compulsory school attendance to 17. It's one of those statements that I believe will encourage kids to stay in school and, again, finish high school for the aforementioned reasons. Now, we all know full well that it's pretty difficult to get a 16-year-old to go to school if they don't want to go. Nevertheless, the sentiment of this and the message

involved from this government shows leadership. We expect our kids to go to school to 17, to become part of an educated workforce, to become part of becoming great citizens. That type of leadership statement is often worth as much as the ability to, say, force a kid to go to school up till the age of 17 would be. I believe that shows some leadership on a policy direction that I would support.

I believe, too, that student-centred residency is a good thing. We should be dealing with where students, kids, live, not where their parents live. We have many different forms of family in the modern world, which reflects the ongoing nature that kids should be the focus, not the parents, and I support that as well.

School boards are happy with the natural power provision. Now we'll have to see what that actually means in regulation. I understand the process is a year-long event to sort that out, so although we'll see what comes out in the small print, the large print is actually quite well received by our school board partners.

I like the language around specialized supports and services, around supporting people with unique challenges in the classroom. Of course, as alluded to by previous speakers, this is only as good as our economic commitment to those who do need the support and the like. Nevertheless, from a leadership perspective this is reasonably good stuff.

In the main there's a lot of stuff in the Education Act that I like.

I will also comment on the bullying aspect. At the start the concept of bullying in school is one that I agree should be put to an end as much as it humanly can be. School is a difficult place. It is for almost anyone growing up in the education system at one time or another. Nevertheless, many children receive it far worse than others, and this should be eradicated in a safe, responsible manner. Again, this is a leadership moment where we have sort of said as a society that we will not tolerate this.

Now, I will agree with my good friend from the fourth party, who states that all of this flows from our commitment to public education in general. Without adequate supports for education, without having teachers in classrooms, without having reasonable size limits in classrooms, without having appropriate opportunities for children to learn, this is a hollow promise. If you have 30, 35 kids in a classroom with one teacher, not only is it difficult for them to learn, but bullying can and does and will continue. Although I like the statement, it's going to have to be backed up with a commitment to actually resource our schools and our teachers with the financial backing that they need to make sure that kids are getting the attention they deserve to thrive both academically and socially and to ensure that kids are not being picked on.

At the end of the day we want to make sure that part of education is not only learning, but it's learning to interact with the rest of our society. Some of it is that, by golly, you should feel good about growing up. I know far too many kids who didn't have a good experience in school, many of them because of bullying, many because of uncomfortable experiences. We should try to remember that growing up ain't easy, and if a school system can be that inclusive, caring, sharing environment where our society comes together and learns to live in acceptance of each other and to be respectful of each other, by all means, that's what we would like to accomplish. The act goes some way in doing that.

I would also note that I like the fact that the minister – I might have gotten my first amendment passed in this House. Maybe I got one other one passed some other time. But there. My contribution to the legislative process has been duly noted, and I thank the minister for implementing that small change to create what I thought was a more inclusive school setting. Bullying can be not only from child to child. It has to be a respectful school

where principals, teachers, parents, everyone observe that schools are not a place for bullying. I believe that was reflected in the wording of the act.

I will now move to what I would consider to be my major criticism of the act. Like I said earlier, leadership and language from a government matters a great deal because it sets the tone for what you expect you want the rest of society to follow through on, and the values you enshrine in your legislation and how you write it matter. You might not think it does in practicality. It might not make a hill of beans of difference, maybe, on how it plays out in day-to-day life, but it matters from a tone, from a leadership position of what we expect our populace to live by.

If you look at our last two drafts of this Education Act, it said full stop that we will incorporate the language of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta human rights code. In those two documents it says explicitly that we will not discriminate against an individual on the base of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. That is clear in those documents, and when we say that in our Education Act, it's clear. People know that. They understand that.

When we start playing with that concept, regardless of whether those things still apply – because they do – we start sending a message to people that, well, although that is really the case, our government recognizes that in certain instances we're allowed to ignore those values. We're allowed in certain instances to ignore the freedom of religion, the freedom of respect for sexual orientation or people that we find diverse. When you start playing with that language, allowing those exceptions, people know your commitment to those values is not really that strong.

I saw that in what played out in Bill 44 in a different fashion, and I see that being played out now. Frankly, I was hoping for better, and I thought: I hope people actually consider that. This was supposed to be a new Progressive Conservative Party that was supposed to be letting those old social wars go. There was seemingly a recognition that we will not tolerate discrimination by any group on the basis of sexual orientation regardless of how long they yell on the Legislature steps, no matter how many letters they're going to write to your constituency office, no matter whether they are going to vote against you in an election or not. We as a people have to stand up for those values, and I believe the government should be standing up for those values.

5:10

Let me point that out because it's clear in here if we look at the wording of what this government has now done. It is right here in section 16. It says that one group is treated differently than other groups. It's under diversity and respect.

16(1) All courses or programs of study [offered] and instructional materials used in a school must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans.

Here's clause (2). This is where you're monkeying around with words, when you're treating people differently, when you're saying: it's really okay to not worry about the Alberta human rights code or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in this instance. This is what it says:

(2) For greater certainty, the courses or programs of study and instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution . . .

religious or otherwise.

You see how that language has been tightened down. There's no longer any reference to people with disabilities, to people's sexual orientation.

Mr. Anderson: That was Lougheed's language.

Mr. Hehr: That's 1985. It's now 2012. Okay? There we go.

You're saying that in certain circumstances it's all right to treat people differently. It's all right. If you're a home-schooler, it's all right. Go ahead. When you're teaching education, it's all right. Have at 'er because these groups don't matter. They don't apply in this legislation. They don't apply to you. You go ahead. That to me is wrong. Okay? It is just wrong to send those mixed messages and mixed metaphors out to society. I believe we can do better. I'm very disappointed in this.

Frankly, I don't think it lends a lot of credence to how you really take your bullying motion seriously. We all look at the bullying motion, and it's common knowledge that children who get bullied in school are or may be perceived to be of a different sexual orientation.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a question or comment. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member if he has anything else to add.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I'd just like to complete that thought. That's very kind of you. Children who are bullied in school – and we have many public educators on that side of the aisle; they should know this – are often ridiculed for reasons of perceived or maybe even different sexual orientation. When you're saying that it's okay for one group of people to be discriminated against, does that really wash when you're saying that bullying and no tolerance of this stuff is really where we're going? Or are we really sending a mixed message? "Yeah, it's okay. Bully those kids still. They're not really included in the language we're covering in this act, so it's okay. You know something? They maybe don't play on the hockey team or the football team. They're a little strange. Go ahead. Bully them." That's the trouble when we mix metaphors, this differentiation in what is expected from different groups of people.

To be honest, I'd like the government and some of you other colleagues to maybe have a discussion about this. There have been two previous ministers who said that this was wrong. At least their drafts that came to this floor said that it was wrong. I appreciate that this minister has worked hard and tried to do this, but I think you as a caucus should go back and discuss whether we should send this mixed message out to really placate a noisy group.

Only 1.5 per cent of our population is home-schooling, and I guess out of that population maybe .2 are really upset about it. I don't know the whole numbers. But, really, come on. Human rights codes mean a lot. And when you don't include them by reference – or not even by reference. When you go out of your way to say in a different language that this doesn't matter, that you're allowed to do what you want, that's where it's really wrong. I encourage you guys to go back into caucus and say: are we really going to do that?

In any event, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have some time. Are there others?

Okay. With that, then, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. An honour to rise. Truly, an honour to rise as the Official Opposition critic for Education. Might I say as well that I like to refer to it as "advocate" because I think it strikes a much better tone.

I guess we might say that the third time is a charm where the Education Act is concerned. Why don't we start with a compliment? Do something completely different, tip our cap to the Minister of Education who was able to make this work and get this bill through. Government does work sometimes. Government does listen sometimes. I believe there were amendments from both sides of the political spectrum, which is tremendous, even though we might not agree with the ones from the members on my left, literally. It is troubling to me that it's so hard sometimes to get to this point. It seems so difficult to listen to the public when they're screaming their displeasure. But, again, we did get there.

To understand where we are, I think, if anything, it helps to know where we came from. Without going back to the beginning of the Education Act, I think it is important that we go back to Bill 2 or at least to the beginning of the last session, the end of the last sitting of the spring Legislature, when we had so many people here voicing their displeasure, because that is when the rubber hit the road. That is when Albertans rose up. That is when the Wildrose Party, led by my colleague the Member for Airdrie and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and a couple of members who are no longer with us, stood up and said: "We hear you. We are listening. We'll be your voice. We will push for the amendments that Albertans want to see in the Education Act." So thank you, sir. Thank you, ma'am.

Mr. Speaker, I heard it loud and clear during the election campaign. I heard it on doorsteps. I heard it at coffee shops. I heard it in church. I heard it at the grocery store. And I would put to you that probably all of us did where the Education Act was concerned. Albertans do not want and did not want the Human Rights Act tied to the Education Act, so we asked them to change it.

The Education minister at the time, you'll recall, tried to marginalize home-schoolers, seemingly suggesting that it was a small group of radical-thinking people with these intolerant views. Well, it didn't take long to see that it wasn't a small group at all and that home-schoolers had a very, very good point. They were supported by charter schools. They were supported by separate schools. They were supported by many in the public system. But it did take a small group of people to come forward and start the ball rolling, and they were backed by a small but very mighty caucus, the Wildrose caucus. Might I point out that – and this may be one of the biggest reasons why – that caucus has since more than quadrupled in size.

5:20

On the issue of parental rights in education parents are the primary educators of their kids. This takes nothing away from the great work that teachers do and the lifelong legacy that teachers leave with their students. Let us never forget that as we talk about parents. We have probably all been touched in positive ways in a legacy aspect from teachers and the mark that they have left on us. But parents have to be empowered to make the decisions they feel are right concerning their kids. You should be able to teach your kids your beliefs without a bureaucrat standing over your shoulder to make sure you are doing it their way. Thank you to the minister once again for recognizing that where his predecessor would not recognize it.

Now, I went to the minister's press conference yesterday downstairs and was very impressed with how forthright he was on many of the issues that were raised. One thing did disappoint me,

though, at that press conference, and that is that the former Education minister, now Deputy Premier, was not there to address many members of the media that would have liked to have asked him questions. On the issue of the Alberta Human Rights Act, which I think is fair to point out because we all remember how polarizing that debate was and all the things that were exchanged, I had several reporters say to me yesterday: "I really would like to ask that minister a question to see what it is that's changed so radically with all of these people all of a sudden, including the minister himself. How is it that they all lump into this new category where it's acceptable?"

On the issue of human rights in education I think we can probably take a lead from the federal government and, in particular, from the Member for Westlock-St. Paul, Mr. Brian Storseth, who succeeded in amending the Canadian Human Rights Act, rightfully pointing out that freedom such as freedom of religion or freedom of association doesn't mean anything without the guarantee of expression, and that does extend to education.

I can support the revised provision to promote understanding and respect for others and to honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans precisely because those common values do include freedom of expression and they do include freedom of religion. This will clear the way, I believe, for parents to continue to do what they do best; that is, parents can be full participants in the education of their children without fearing persecution from a human rights lawyer who has his or her own agenda.

Now, I do have some concerns with the new Education Act, of course. I think we probably all do. It's a thick document. It'll never be perfect. I would like to make a point on a couple of them. First of all, increasing the age of access to 21 is a novel goal. We should try to get as many kids to graduate as we can. I know we'd all agree on that. My concern is the potential social problems that could arise when you have a 21-year-old young man in a cafeteria with a 15-year-old girl for all intents and purposes. I think schools are aware of that concern, too. I know I heard it from principals. I heard it from educators in my travels this summer. I would bet that the Education minister did as well as probably many of us. It's something to keep our eye on, to make sure that the supports are there for schools so that they deal with these issues and they don't morph into something much more serious that we wouldn't want to see. There could be other options that we could look at, perhaps a community college class.

Raising the compulsory age to 17. Again, the idea is great. Let's keep our kids in school, I think, as long as we can. Let's get them through grade 12. But there would be, I think, potential problems with enforcement of this. I'd rather see us catch students and help them before they get to the point where they do want to drop out. Again, I think we'd all agree on that point. I guess to close on it, to say that improving our grad rate – I just think it's a lot more complex than to suggest that changing the age will fix it, but maybe it is a good step. Raising it by a year does seem, you know, a little simplistic. I hope it works. Let's monitor the level of success.

On the issue of inclusion in our schools – many people have spoken to it already, and I'm sure we'll hear more – I'm concerned that in our desire to be more inclusive, are we making the environment more difficult for the students and the teachers at times? In our desire for the greater good we might actually be being counterproductive. There's no template or formula, I don't think, when it comes to including students with special needs in classes.

I've heard it from several teachers, again, in my travels around the province this summer, specific examples where, you know,

you might have a classroom with three or four students below the reading level by a couple of years. Maybe you add a special-needs student to that classroom, and then you have a couple of students with ESL that are struggling with the language. You can wind up taking away from the entire group sometimes is what I'm hearing from parents and from teachers. So we want to make sure that we give them the resources they need to make this happen. I think it makes great sense, also, to let these things be decided locally. Let teachers and principals and parents have their say. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. If we travelled our own schools, I'm sure we'd hear that there are many different circumstances.

It's a huge bill. It is hugely important to the future of our kids, which means it's hugely important to the future of Alberta. I know we all take it seriously. I see the passion, hear the passion today. I heard it when I was trying to make some points to counter some points that were made over here, although I listened to those points without feeling the need to throw my points at them at the same time.

Again, I applaud the work of the government and the current Education minister on this. We all had better recognize the years of work that went into it and the thousands of stakeholders and parents that had their say to try and put this together. Once again I'd like to applaud the opposition and my colleagues the Member for Airdrie and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the other two members who were here, that I think led the charge in many ways to get some of this done.

There is much, much to say on the bill. I know many others want to have their say. We're going to go through it. We're going to consult with stakeholders. I look forward to more discussion.

Again, thank you for the honour of speaking on behalf of what I view as something very important in the province of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 3, and I feel quite privileged to be able to do so. I acknowledge that this has been a work-in-progress for a number of years, that there have been many groups that have been consulted. I'm happy to share my perspective and those that represent many Albertans, so I come at this bill with a mixed review.

I'll begin by outlining the aspects of this bill that I agree with. First, the student-centred residency. The fact that it's where the student resides as opposed to a parent or guardian and is more student focused I think is a positive. As well, raising the age of access to 21 I think is very important. I myself am a teacher and educator. I taught for six years in a very special school that has students that range from the age of 15 to 24, and I can say with great confidence that that school works very, very well. I find it outrageous that there's an insinuation that if there are older students with younger students, there will be predator acts that will automatically take place because of different ages.

I think it's about respect, respecting students of all ages. The advantage when you look at schools like K to 12 is that you have older students that are able to mentor younger students. In addition to that, coming from my own experience, I think there are students that because of extraneous circumstances or circumstances outside of their control are unable to complete their high school or complete their schooling within the prescribed number of years, and some of them require additional time to be able to do that. So giving them the access to finish their schooling I think is very, very important.

I'd like to talk about inclusive education, which, again, I think is a fantastic concept that has been often touted by this government. The challenge that I hear from colleagues and from many teachers around the province is that an inclusive classroom is a great concept, but in order for students and teachers to be successful, you need an appropriate number of resources for them. Putting 30 students in a classroom, 10 with special needs and extraneous needs, with one teacher to try to ensure that they can deliver the highest quality of education is quite absurd.

The concept of inclusive education can work and can work very, very well, but there need to be supports available. Again, I can draw from my own experiences where the school that I taught at had youth workers, support workers, outreach workers, a native elder, a social worker all on hand to provide wraparound services. I look forward to pressing this government to ensure that schools, teachers, students, and parents have the resources to ensure that our children and our students are successful.

Another aspect that I like from this is the fact that the francophone elector and trustee eligibility has been broadened – and I can't find it off the top here – where the requirement was removed that they had to have a student enrolled in a school. I think that will be very well accepted by many French speakers and francophones.

5:30

There are aspects of this act that I will articulate that need to be changed or amended and ones that I find very disappointing. First and foremost, it's quite alarming that the wording of this proposed bill has the removal of the Canadian Charter of Rights of Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act. A former Premier of this province, who led the Conservatives to their first victory, former Premier Lougheed, was the one who introduced the Alberta Human Rights Act, and I find it quite alarming that this government somehow deems it appropriate to remove that from the Education Act. Those two documents protect the fundamental human rights and democratic rights of all people. It is my belief that this needs to be amended and inserted back into this education bill.

Another aspect that's missing is that school fees are not addressed. More and more schools are being downloaded with additional fees. We've got deferred maintenance on infrastructure. You know, I'd love to articulate that. Today it was uttered many times that the province was clear and free from debt years ago, when a former Premier announced it. It depends how you define that. When you transfer infrastructure deficit off your own books and then say, "Yes, we're debt free" – well, the head of the public school board was on CBC this morning talking about how in the next couple of years the public school board will have a billion-dollar infrastructure deficit. I'm sure that if we don't start addressing that now, that number is just going to continue to soar.

As well, something is missing from this act, full-day kindergarten. Again, this was a promise of our Premier some months back. I find it disappointing that this is not going to be realized in the time that was initially committed to. And the fact that we still have grade 3 provincial exams: clearly, that's something that needs to be addressed.

The last point that I'd like to bring up is the issue of bullying, which I think is a very serious matter. I'm happy to see that this is an issue that we are discussing and that is coming up and that all of us are feeling a responsibility in legislation. However, my frustration, as my colleague has mentioned, is that it's difficult and challenging for educators and school staff to deal with the issue of bullying when there are so few staff members. You've got larger class sizes or class sizes that continue to grow, and you

have a shortage of staff that are able to be there to ensure that bullying does not take place.

In addition to that, the chilling effect of Bill 44, which was passed some time ago, is going to be a huge deterrent or an obstruction to schools dealing with bullying. I say that because if, for example, the reason that one child is being bullied happens to be based on an issue that a parent deems to be contentious, well, now the school can't deal with it. They can't address it. They can't sit down with the students to talk about the implications of their actions or words. I find that to be very, very restrictive. In fact, that nullifies and paralyzes schools to be able to deal with certain bullying situations.

I and my colleagues will be calling on this government and the House and all members to heed our calls for amending this bill to ensure that it truly is inclusive and reflects the values of all Albertans and protects our students and ensures that they get the highest quality of education.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to touch on my colleague for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I guess that as a father of a 15-year-old daughter that's where I worry about the 21-year-old in the same parameters. I guess that's one of my complaints about the Education Act as it's presented here. I understand that at 18 there's a bit of a difference there. I mean, you can lead people down a different path in the same scenario. I guess that's where my stance is as a very protective father, to say the least. I don't want to put my 15-year-old daughter into that position or a 14 and a half year old. She could have been there at the beginning of grade 10. That's just one of my thoughts, I guess, where my background comes from on the difference in age.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, do you care to respond?

Mr. Bilous: Oh, yes, I would love to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue here is that there's an assumption that based on age, suddenly there's going to be either some kind of issue or putting the life of a 15-year-old in jeopardy. The reality is that schools are meant to be safe places. Regardless of that, if we have an appropriate number of staff working in the schools, the member's daughter or anyone's child, therefore, should be safely watched over.

You know, with the issue of discriminating against students that are older or saying that they can't be part of the school environment, I think that what we're doing is that we're missing out on an opportunity. As I touched on earlier, older students can learn from younger students and vice versa. Quite often in elementary schools grade 6 students will mentor grade 1 students and work with them. I think there's much learning that can take place. I would ask the members to consider the positives in that situation. I'll leave my comments there.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)? Okay.

Additional speakers? The Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise here and speak to Bill 3, the Education Act. I'm excited about this. As the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View pointed out, this is a success story in government. This is when government actually –

it took an election and a near-death experience – did listen at the end of the day.

You know, I was going to read some kind of a more generic, fun speech, but I just have to address certain things, as members in this House know. It's too much to listen to some of this and not respond.

First of all, the importance of parental rights is absolutely paramount. It is something that is laid out very clearly in the United Nations declaration of human rights, that parents have a prior right to determine what education their children will receive. Now, that doesn't mean they get to pick which textbooks their kids are going to have to study grade 3 math, for example. We understand there are limits to that. What it does mean is that parents have the right to make sure that the learning environment that they send their kids to, the schools that they send their kids to, is something that is in line with their values and is something that is in line with what they're teaching their children.

That's why in Alberta, unlike in other dictatorships around the world, we allow parents the freedom to choose where they send their children to school. We allow them to choose if they're going to send them to a public school, a very inclusive public school, one that includes all folks from all different backgrounds. That's where I choose to send the only child of mine that's old enough to go to school right now. That's what I want for my child. Others send theirs to private, religious-based schools, where the religious curriculum is taught and permeates through the entire curriculum as a whole. You see that in Catholic schools, obviously. You see that in other faith-based schools of all faiths: Christian, Muslim.

5:40

We have a great school in Chestermere, near Chestermere and Conrich, the Khalsa school, a great school for young Sikhs. It's a great school, and it's something that we should be proud of, and I think we are. I think the vast majority of the people in this House, on that side of the House and this side of the House, are proud of that reputation of giving parents the right to educate their children as they see fit.

Now, let's be very clear. The Human Rights Act as currently constituted does apply to the Education Act. It does apply to it. It applies to every act in Alberta, to every single act, okay? [interjection] Well, I'll get to it. I'll get to it. Therefore, there's nothing in that act – if something is out of line with the Human Rights Act in that act, guess what? Not only the Human Rights Act but the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will take care of that, will make sure that it is in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So that's taken care of.

The problem was never that. That was never the objection of the home-schoolers, the Catholic schoolers, and the thousands of other parents across this province that had a problem with this. The problem was that the act seemed to create a possibility, at the very least a possibility if not a probability, that the act could be used in certain circumstances. If parents did not teach their children something in line with what the Human Rights Commission had said or values that the Human Rights Commission had found, if they had not taught their children that value, the act could be used as a sword to essentially end the accreditation of the faith-based school in question. It could be used to end the right of the parents to home-educate their children.

It did not explicitly say that by any stretch, but the hole was there, and you could see it. It was plain in the language that somebody up to mischief under a different Education minister or perhaps under a different government could use that to take away the rights of certain parents who had certain values to be able to teach their children or send their kids to certain schools, and a

school could even lose their accreditation over it. That was always the problem, and that's why hundreds of Albertans gathered on the steps of the Legislature and thousands across the province to protest this act. I am very glad that they did because I think that the government after a period of time did come to the understanding and agreement with those parents.

Now, I personally am tired of hearing the allegations that parents who believed in this change, who believe that their children should be taught in Catholic school and taught a Catholic doctrine, which we know is not the same – you know, obviously, a lot of people have different beliefs. We know that some of those beliefs don't make sense to certain sensibilities of others and vice versa. We know that there's some controversy on some of those beliefs, and I don't think it is right to tell parents of a different faith that because they want their kids to be brought up in that environment and taught those values, they are somehow intolerant bigots. That has got to stop.

That's why I absolutely applaud the Education minister, the current Education minister, not the former Education minister, who absolutely went along with that type of ridicule and name calling and fearmongering and hate-mongering. That Education minister used those exact same arguments against not only this party but against the actual home-schoolers and Catholic schoolers and people that had a problem themselves in the media and so forth with his quotes. He used those exact same arguments, and it was very offensive.

This Education minister seems to be much smarter about it. Not only smarter about it, but I think he genuinely sees that you can't persecute people because they choose to have their children educated in a faith-based environment. He should be absolutely applauded for showing that type of leadership.

The accusations, I believe, of intolerance are unfounded and wrong. Frankly, I would ask the folks that are accusing those of us over here and over there and parents in general in that situation of being intolerant to maybe look in the mirror a little bit because I think that the intolerance might be on the other side.

All right. Now that that's done, there are a couple of things I would like to address in this act that I think could be improved or are in here already and that I support. First of all, bullying. Everyone in this Assembly agrees that no person, no child should be bullied for any reason. I don't care what their sexual orientation is, whether they are skinny or fat or something in between. I don't care what the colour of their skin is, what their religion is. It doesn't matter. No child should ever have to undergo bullying for any reason. I think everybody in this House – everybody – can agree on that. So I again would like to applaud the Education minister and the former Education minister and the former, former Education minister for making this a key part of the bill. It's something that I think we certainly all support in this House.

Three improvements I think we could have here, and I think we'll be bringing some amendments on a couple of them anyway. First of all, we saw what I think is the stupidity of the no-zero policy, a teacher who was fired for giving out a zero for incomplete work. What a ridiculous, nonsensical thing that is. You shouldn't have to put something like that in a piece of legislation. It should be so common sense. I have four kids. I expect teachers in this province – if my child does not turn in their assignment, they'd better darn well get a zero on their work so that they learn a lesson and they make sure to turn their work in the next time. That should absolutely be addressed. No teacher should be fired for giving a zero for incomplete work. We'd like to see that in the bill. I don't know how you'd word it. I'm open to suggestions. But it's just so ridiculous. Obviously, with the Education Act you don't want to interfere with local autonomy; however, the Education

Act does layout some base parameters, some base expectations that go across the entire province, and this, I think, should be one.

The second piece is mandatory school fees, something that we campaigned vigorously on during the election. I think it makes sense. There should be no mandatory fees in place if the course in question is something that a child needs to progress or graduate or go to the next grade. We're not talking about field trips. We're not talking about transportation, even, and some of these other things. We're just talking about: you cannot pass this course unless you pay these fees, and if you don't pass this course, then you can't be promoted to the next level or graduate and so forth. That should be eliminated. It wouldn't cost that much money. We could make this a priority. That's something that we think we should do, and I am disappointed to see that that's not in there.

Lastly, charter schools. Charter schools, I believe, are a fantastic way for the school system to innovate, for the public school system to innovate. We forget that charter schools are public schools. They are public schools. They are not private schools as sometimes they are accused of being. They are public schools. First-come, first-served, no-tuition charter schools. In my view, we should be making it far more easy – far more easy – for groups, for public schools themselves, for others to transform their schools into charter schools or to start new charter schools because charter schools, like I say, are the great innovators.

There are different learning methods – pedagogical, I think, is the word – that are used and different ways of teaching the curriculum to different types of students; for example, students with disabilities, people with reading disabilities who might be good in math and science but not good in reading, people with language needs, and so forth. I think we should be opening the doors. Just open the doors wide for charter schools, let innovation take hold, give more flexibility to the public system to offer specialized programs in the trades for children with disabilities and so forth.

Although that part isn't in this act, I hope that in the future with the good work that the hon. House leader has done as well as the current Education minister on – help me out here. What's that great thing, the report that you put forward?

An Hon. Member: Inspiring Education.

Mr. Anderson: Inspiring Education – I lost the word for a second – the great work that was done there. Please continue to build on that. I think we are going to continue to lead the nation on education.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Associate Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the member across considers himself to be a very principled individual, and I know that he and his party have advocated for greater local autonomy. He mentioned in his speech the issue around creating policy or legislation or some specific guidance in the School Act that maybe suggests that the provincial government should step into that which is normally considered a responsibility of a locally elected school board. I know as a former school board trustee that we need to continue to make sure our school boards have the authority to make decisions based on their electorate and the wishes of their electorate. I don't think there's any language within the current School Act or the proposed one,

this new Education Act, that suggests that school boards can't allow a policy. Wouldn't it be consistent with the principles of what this member has advocated for with his party to allow school boards to continue to set that policy?

Mr. Anderson: That's a very fair question, and it needs to be debated. I guess my point is that although I think we all agree that there should be local autonomy in our school system as much as possible, we do have a School Act. It's a very thick act. The reason we have this is that it sets out some basic parameters, just very basic things about how the education system will be run, and then local school boards have to work within that framework. For example, curriculum. We set the curriculum. We don't just leave that to the school boards. The province sets the curriculum, so there's a general standard. Now, there are differences in how it's taught between the different school boards and so forth, and there's flexibility in other areas.

I guess the issue here – and maybe this is more about protecting teachers than anything else – is that there needs to be, in my view, a basic standard around how we treat our teachers and how we deal with their decisions. I just cannot find one justification for why a teacher, certainly an experienced teacher like the one in question but any teacher, frankly, should ever be fired – ever be fired – for giving a zero to a student for not completing his assignment. He's doing his job. In fact, he's probably doing his job far more than the teacher that would not give a zero for an incomplete assignment. He's doing that child a much greater service than the teacher that would just kind of let it slide. I just think it's completely wrong.

I guess the point there is that although I agree with you that we should try to keep local autonomy as sacrosanct as possible, I think we do need to have a minimum standard. I think that making sure teachers are not fired for doing their job should be part of that minimum standard.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I'm fascinated by the hon. member's concept of assessment, so I'm just interested to ask: when a teacher is doing an assessment of a student's knowledge with respect to, say, for example, a physics course, is that assessment to be based on the student's understanding of the content of the course? Or should that assessment with respect to that particular course be based on whether the student showed up for class or not? What is the mark in the physics course intended to designate on a transcript as it goes forward to a university or to the workforce? Is it the understanding of the content of the course, or is it supposed to be about work ethic?

Mr. Anderson: It should clearly be both. Clearly, if someone wants to go to university, they need to (a) learn how to attend class – that's key – and (b) comprehend the material. I think it's both. So I think if someone doesn't do their work, if someone doesn't show up to class, then they should receive a lower mark and be assessed lower.

Mr. Hancock: I take it, then, from the hon. member's comments that we should stop allowing students to challenge exams on courses in order to get the criteria for a class, that every student should be required to go through a full course of subject and to write all the assessment tools throughout that course before they

get a mark on the course? We shouldn't have challenge exams on any courses available to students?

Mr. Anderson: You know, I would think that in order to allow a student to catch up or to excel and get ahead if the student is that fantastic, he should be given that opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time for 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

I would ask at this time: are there any additional speakers? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a bill that makes me proud to be part of an effective Wildrose opposition. The government made a bad decision to try and negate parental rights in the previous Education Act, and an effective opposition forced them to backtrack. The opposition that arose to the previous Education Act was enormous. The response came from parents across the province that were united about one thing: they cared about the education of their children.

Mr. Speaker, as a parent of two children, one in school and one no longer in school, I appreciate that it is my paramount right to educate my child the way my husband and I see fit. I have to say that I might have to sit down and take a drink of water because I've just learned that our choice has led me to educate our 10-year-old daughter, Madison, in the St. Marguerite Catholic school in Innisfail, which was my parental choice, and then I learned that the hon. Member for Airdrie educates his child in a public school. Given our dynamics I find that very interesting.

Over 2,000 people came and protested in the freezing cold on the steps of this Legislature. As the Member for Airdrie and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek have reminded me, the media had remarked that this was one of the biggest crowds they had ever seen at the Legislature. The members for Airdrie and Calgary-Fish Creek fought for parental rights until the last day of the legislative sitting, when opposition to the bill forced the government to let it die on the Order Paper. With that, parents from across this province breathed a sigh of relief.

After trying to act as if the Wildrose opposition was only trying to fearmonger, the government has taken our position and taken the contentious sections out of the bill. Now Bill 3 is generally a good piece of legislation. I'll leave it to my colleagues that have some amendments to improve this bill further. I appreciate all the hard work that they're doing on that.

I am reminded of an initiative that was first taken on behalf of the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek when she started to advocate for seniors who were getting terrible centralized meals. After I became elected, she educated me on how this process worked and the bureaucracy of all of it, that they just have to do it because that's the way it's done. It wasn't right, Mr. Speaker, and the government took no initiative to change this. However, there was an effective opposition, and the government finally decided to listen. I believe that's what has happened on the Education Act.

I would like to take a moment to thank the government for bringing this bill forward in a much more respectful manner than we saw when this bill was last introduced. I think the minister has been honest and forthcoming with his intentions. It is a lot different than what parents saw the last time this bill was introduced, when the then Education minister, now Deputy Premier, tried to sneak in section 16, acted as if opponents to this bill didn't know what they were talking about, and even tweeted that those who protested the bill at the Legislature were protesting against human rights in the education system. That move was a complete and utter disrespect to parents across this province, opponents of the bill in this House, and perhaps, I think, this government as well.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, an effective opposition has forced this government to listen to Albertans, and now we have a good piece of legislation that will benefit parents, students, and educators across this province. I'm proud to be part of a Wildrose opposition that helped lead this, and I hope this government will work together to put Albertans first.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

It is now 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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