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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 30, 2012

Issue 11a

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)
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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)
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DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (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)
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Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
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Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (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)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
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Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
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Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Luan	Young
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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Smith

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Kubinec	

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Casey	Xiao
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Fraser	Vacant
Hale	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 30, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, bless all of us with a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Bless us with a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve, and bless us with Your guidance to help meet those needs to the best of our abilities. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group joining here today us all the way from the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The group is in Alberta to sign agreements with both Alberta Education and Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education working together in education. Leading the delegation is Mr. José Antonio Gloria Morales, Secretary of Education for the state of Jalisco. I'd ask them to stand and to remain standing when I announce their names. The Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education and I had the pleasure of meeting with him today, and I can assure you that he is very committed to education and passionate about his state.

Mr. Speaker, also here as part of the delegation and seated in the Speaker's gallery are Andrés Barba and Thalia Pérez Llamas. With them in the gallery are staff from both departments, who've been working hard to make these agreements and this MOU extension possible. From Enterprise and Advanced Education we have Caleb Nienkirchen, and from Education we have Waldemar Riemer.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, we hosted an event at Government House, with a lunch, to formally sign both MOUs. We were lucky enough to have several students join us there as well. These students are also here with us today in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to stand as I introduce them. From Austin O'Brien high school in Edmonton please welcome international exchange students Alieth Ramirez and Angel Chavez Vasquez. From l'ecole Notre Dame high school in Red Deer we have international student Patricia Martinez Gallardo. Accompanying them today are teachers Derek Hatch and Richard Foret as well as Jackie Bodker from Alberta Education.

Mr. Speaker, this was a great extension of a very good MOU between Alberta and Mexico, and I know the entire Assembly will join me in welcoming them to Alberta.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three wonderful grade 9 classes from my old school, George McDougall. They're here today with several teachers, including somebody I graduated the same year as and who was always a much better student than I, Ms Devon Sawby. Of course, Ms Kristin Duncan is here, Constable David Henry, Constable Meagan Fillion, and our former mayor of Airdrie Mrs. Linda

Bruce is accompanying them, so if we could please give them the warm reception of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly several government of Alberta employees who are participating in a leadership program led by the Ministry of Human Services. This is a program which employees can volunteer for when they want to develop their leadership skills. With us today are Gordon Weighell, the team mentor, from Human Services; Amanda Jackman from Education; Lesley van de Ligt from Justice, Meenu Nath from Human Services; Mike Wordell from Solicitor General; Myra DeCoteau from Human Services; and Sabrina Marling from Health. I'd ask all of them to stand and be recognized by Members of this Legislative Assembly for the good work they and the people they represent do on behalf of Albertans.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of special guests who are here today to hear and to support my member's statement on Irlen syndrome. Some of these individuals have travelled from across our province to be here today. I ask that they rise as I introduce them.

Nola Stigings, who is a certified Irlen diagnostician from Innisfail, has brought with her Lisa Hansen from Red Deer and Lisa Goodwin from Calgary, both certified screeners. Judy Pool, a reading specialist and Irlen diagnostician from Edmonton, has brought with her three guests who have all been diagnosed with Irlen's: Rachel Maskowitz, Amy-Lynn Bienert, and Colleen Stott. Finally, Bettylyn Baker, a teacher and certified Irlen screener, has brought with her Sarah Verbeek and her two sons, nine-year-old Champ and seven-year-old Wyatt Verbeek from Youngstown. Champ and Wyatt have both been diagnosed with Irlen's, and you can see that they're wearing the filtered lenses that have changed their lives. These individuals have persevered in their fight against Irlen syndrome, which is a visual perceptual impairment. I would now ask that all members join me in the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly for my guests.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of guests who are members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Working as social workers and correctional peace officers, these individuals are regularly exposed to volatile and traumatic events. The cumulative experience of such traumatic events often leads to posttraumatic stress disorder. Our guests today seek to have their occupations recognized for presumptive WCB coverage in Bill 1. Doing so will ensure that those who suffer PTSD are not revictimized by having to relive the events that made them sick in order to obtain WCB benefits. I would now ask my guests to rise as I call their names: Monte Bobinski, Michele Deuél-Bobinski, Hal Griffith, Dennis Malaylco, Shamanthi Cooray, Morag Rempel, and Heather Sweet. I'd appreciate it if members could join me in welcoming them to the Legislature.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you

to all Members of the Legislative Assembly eight guests here in recognition of the North Edmonton Seniors Association's grand reopening of their newly reconstructed facility; namely, the Northgate Lions Seniors Recreation Centre. You may recall the devastating collapse of the centre's gymnasium roof on January 25, 2011, which made it necessary to temporarily relocate the association's educational, health, recreational, and social activities.

My guests today are chosen to represent the North Edmonton Seniors Association in honour of their exemplary long-term volunteer service. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and remain standing as I mention their names. We have with us this afternoon Mr. Hugh Newell, president; Mr. Steve Shamchuk, past president; Mrs. Grace Swekla; Mrs. Brenda Doucet; Mrs. Sharlene Wyness; Mr. Jim McArdle; Mr. Ed Doucet; and Mrs. Shirley Curle. I would now ask that my colleagues please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rowe: Thank you. With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions to make today. I'd like to do them separately so that each may be recognized in their own right. Thank you.

I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an exceptional lady who truly defines the meaning of an outstanding citizen. An active member of our community, she served on the village of Beiseker council, volunteered for the fire department, is the lead on the disaster services committee, a member of the community hall board, pinch-hits at the local doctor's office and the village office, and she even found time to volunteer during my campaign. Among her most ambitious projects is being a member of the local Helping Hands group. Putting her artistic talents to work, they have made over 1,200 afghans for the needy and numerous quilts for charitable organizations. She is always giving her time, lending a hand whenever and wherever needed, and has an exceptional dedication to our community. She is known for her energy, her enthusiasm, and her wonderful disposition. Deeply respected and loved, she is an inspiration to us all. I am privileged to call her my friend. I would ask that Vera Schmaltz rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly another exceptional lady, a pillar of the community I call home. As well as serving on a number of committees and boards, she also found time to play a pivotal role in a very important campaign in the last election, mine. I would ask that my wife, Carol, rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two leaders from the community of Fort Saskatchewan. The first is Brenda Gheran. She is the executive director for the Northeast Region Community Awareness Emergency Response, a mouthful. We like to call it NRCAER. This organization co-ordinates mutual aid for emergency response in our very growing Alberta's Industrial Heartland. It serves nine municipalities and 31

industries. In addition, they also provide a valuable education program to the community.

The second individual is Conal MacMillan. He is the executive director of the Fort Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. This chamber brings together over 350 local members to work collectively to advance small business and industry in our community. As we know, these groups are essential in representing the interests of industry and business. I would ask Brenda and Conal, who are seated in the members' gallery, to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an absolute pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three of my constituents: Karly and Gloria Roszell and their mother, Priscilla. This is their first time visiting question period, and they came all the way from Cache Lake, near the Saddle Lake reserve. This is a very educated family. Karly wants to become a lawyer, and we can always, of course, use more lawyers in this world. Gloria wants to take architecture and engineering, and Priscilla, when she grows up, wants to become an aboriginal lobbyist. These are some outstanding Albertans with a very bright future. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute privilege today for me to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 12 policy interns from the Ministry of Health. This group plays a critical role in strengthening policy capacity within the ministry, and I'm very pleased that they have chosen health policy as an area in which to focus their career interests. They are here in question period this afternoon. I would ask each of them to rise as I call their names: William Camm, James Carver, Salvatore Cucchiara, Scott Fullmer, Tiko Gumberidze, Nirosha Gunasekara, Fedja Lazarevic, Kristi MacNeil, Brady Olsen, Dorothy Roberts, Alysha Visram, and Fiona Wang. They are joined by Burnadene Ebanks, manager of human resource strategies in the ministry. I'd ask all members to provide them with an especially warm welcome.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Mike Boldt. Mr. Boldt resides in the wonderful community of Spruce Grove, which Minister Horner made sure that I would remind you of. Mr. Boldt is a children's author and illustrator. Please stand, Mr. Boldt, and be recognized by this Assembly.

The Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. member, about not using names of individuals who are elected in this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone who means a great deal to me, Marion Eggen, my mother. Marion was born and raised in Vermilion, Alberta, and has been a nurse, a hospital administrator, and, of course, means a great deal to me and my family in everything that we do. If she could please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Service Alberta, did you have an introduction?

Mr. Bhullar: Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have some folks from my department join me here this afternoon to witness the grand theatre that has become question period. I'd ask them to rise as I announce their names: Rhonda Lothammer; Wanda Benning; Lisa Lai; Claudette Dunsing; Twyla Job; Nathan Stelnicki; and, of course, our two policy analysts who have been working very intently on a particular piece of legislation that will be introduced a little later this afternoon. I'd ask my colleagues to give them a warm reception.

Members' Statements

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

North Edmonton Seniors Association Northgate Lions Seniors Recreation Centre

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 25, 2011, the North Edmonton Seniors Association lost access to a well-known gem of a facility in north Edmonton. The Northgate Lions Seniors Recreation Centre experienced a real disaster on that day as the building's roof had collapsed. Since that time, facility manager Maggie Nichol alongside many hard-working, tireless staff and volunteers did an admirable job in relocating and reorganizing association activities in various alternate locations during the infrastructure rebuilding process. This was a daunting task, truly a living example of the Alberta spirit as the association provides over 180 recreational, social, educational, and health-related programs per season.

On September 21, 2012, I had the pleasure of joining the membership of this organization, the city of Edmonton mayor, city councillors, and the construction and architectural firms to help celebrate the grand reopening of the Northgate Lions Seniors Recreation Centre. The North Edmonton Seniors Association and the city of Edmonton turned the disaster into an opportunity to reconstruct and retrofit a beautiful \$5.8 million gathering place for all seniors to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that the more we do for humanity, the more benefits we receive. Special thanks to the North Edmonton Seniors Association for contributing annually over 42,000 volunteer hours to the centre and community at large. I would like to commend the membership, staff, and all the volunteers of the North Edmonton Seniors Association, who worked so tirelessly through their 20 months of dislocation, and wish them all many years of laughter, learning, and living in their new home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Professional Sports Arena for Edmonton

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the topic of Edmonton's downtown arena is back in the news, I thought I'd take some time to clarify where we in the Wildrose stand on this issue. The Wildrose wants Edmonton to have an arena. We like having two NHL hockey teams in our province. We like what this means for Alberta, for our two major cities, and for our economy, and we think that a new arena for the city of Edmonton would be a fabulous addition to a rejuvenated and ever-evolving downtown core but not at any cost.

Last year I put out a proposal to help fund this project, one that would require no additional funding from the province and, most

importantly, would protect taxpayers from being forced into having to pay for it. It's a lottery, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply, it would be a branded lottery sponsored by the province dedicated to generating revenues for Alberta's two NHL hockey teams with the express purpose of raising funds for a new arena. It would give Albertans, passionate hockey fans, a direct stake in their team's future and, critically it would be entirely voluntary. We estimate that it would generate between \$5 million and \$10 million annually for Alberta's hockey teams, which is a steady stream of revenue to help offset arena costs.

Now, yesterday the Municipal Affairs minister got quite agitated at the idea of a lottery, apparently forgetting that this very government implemented a lottery in 2001 to raise money for Alberta's NHL hockey teams. It was a good idea then; it's a good idea now.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, let me also put to rest a false comparison the same minister made. He suggested that there is no difference between municipalities using provincial MSI dollars to build a public recreation centre or an NHL hockey arena. We disagree. One is a public asset, the other a private endeavour. That's why we support a lottery. If you want a new downtown arena for Edmonton or someday for Calgary . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Time Limits

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we start the clock for question period, let me remind you that one of our objectives in question period is to allow as many members as time permits to rise and ask their questions. Our rule is that you are allowed 35 seconds for each question and 35 seconds for each answer, and no preambles to supplemental questions are allowed. Therefore, when your 35 seconds are up and over, I will stand up as soon as I possibly can and recognize the next member to keep the pace moving. Start the clock.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition.

Lobbying Government

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we'd like to know more about the government's dealings with the Katz Group on a number of matters. The Finance Minister said yesterday: "The Katz Group asked for a change in casino licences. We said no. The group asked for direct funding for the arena. We said no." Will the minister provide details on when and where those meetings took place, who attended those meetings, who arranged those meetings, and how the no decisions were made and communicated?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to get you the dates of the meetings. It's not a secret. I've met with stakeholders in this province pretty much consistently since I've become the minister. Even previous to that, a number of years ago I recall the discussion around the possibility of changing casino licensing was brought forward, and the answer was no then. The answer is no today, and the answer will presumably be no in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that making a request for a change in a casino licence seems like a lobbying effort and given that a special request for targeted funding through an extraordinary adjustment to the municipal infrastructure funding program also seems like lobbying, who was the registered lobbyist representing the Katz Group when the casino and the funding requests were made?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of who the registered lobbyist was. One of the occasions was at a social occasion where I was approached and asked whether the government would consider it. I said no.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we ask legitimate questions about the government's cavalier attitude toward the cozy connection between party donors, government policy, grant request, funding arrangements, handling of government investments, sloppy election laws, and now hazy lobbying practices, we get dodging, glib brush-offs, misdirection, and jokes about the Kennedy assassination. When will they come clean and tell Albertans the whole story?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as usual we have the opportunity to discuss all of these issues in the House based on newspaper reports. The good thing about these newspaper reports is that they have accurately reflected the dialogue with respect to public policy on these issues. There is no dispute or any confusion about the government's position with respect to casino licences, with respect to funding of arenas. We have been very clear, people who have interests in these issues have been very clear, and the stories have been very clear.

MLA Remuneration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the government appears ready to use its majority to slip through another increase in MLA pay while trying to convince Albertans that an extra thousand dollars a month is actually a decrease in compensation. No wonder these guys can't balance the budget. They clearly want to increase MLA pay despite the Premier and the whip messing up the strategy for how to do it. How can they justify this thousand-dollar-a-month increase of taxpayer cash when the provincial budget is so far out of whack?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I received information today with respect to the Leader of the Opposition and another hon. member from that side of the House bringing a motion forward . . .

An Hon. Member: Are you spying on us?

Ms Redford: I believe it was a press release or on the Internet with respect to a motion that is coming to the Members' Services Committee, which is a committee of this Legislature. It is important for that committee to do its work without a partisan perspective.

I will also say that we have been very committed to a transparent process with respect to compensation, and Albertans support that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's so hard to get a clear answer from this government. We want a simple yes or no to this question. Is the government going to use its majority to push through an 8 per cent raise, a thousand dollars a month, for MLAs in the form of fully taxpayer-funded RRSP contributions? Yes or no?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there is a process under way at Members' Services. We have been very clear with respect to the information that's been provided. There have been months of

study with respect to this, and I look forward to the results of the committee decision.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, even if they try to hit undo a bunch of times to erase this terrible RRSP idea, the damage has already been done. Our collective reputation as MLAs has already been damaged. More importantly, there's a signal that if 8 per cent more is good for MLAs, it must also be good for our public-sector unions. How are they going to unring that bell?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that if she was worried about the collective reputation of MLAs in this House, she should actually look at the conduct of her party in the last six days.

However, Mr. Speaker, the Members' Services Committee has been considering a number of recommendations from the Major commission with respect to compensation pay, most of which this government has already rejected. We think it's appropriate for Members' Services to ensure that the work is being done to reflect what MLAs do right across this spectrum, and we look forward to the decision of the committee next week.

Ms Smith: At least I've been here the last six days. [interjections]

Provincial Borrowing

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister likes to compare the provincial budget to a family budget, and he's trying to soft-pedal a \$3 billion budget deficit by comparing . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor, and I think she is abundantly familiar with most of the rules by now. I'd ask her to please abide by them and please rephrase.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister likes to compare the provincial budget to a family budget. He's trying to soft-pedal a \$3 billion budget deficit by comparing it to a household mortgage. It's a ludicrous comparison because if a family's income drops, they don't spend more, they don't take expensive trips to London, they don't eat at fancy restaurants, and they certainly don't book hotel rooms that they don't use. But here, with projected revenues down, way down, we see no evidence of anything except more borrowing. What real adjustments is the government family going to make to its spending?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure how all of that connected in terms of what I may have been comparing to the family's budget. I think it's important to note that the ridiculous statements of the opposition Finance critic and the opposition leader that suggested that we would have a budget that would be balanced without putting the mortgage payment in it: I've never said any such thing. In fact, what we've said is that we will balance the budget, and included in that budget will be the funding of our capital plan like any responsible financial manager would do. We will do that. In addition, if they had been paying attention when we gave the first-quarter update, they would have heard . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Finance minister seems to be justifying the potential for additional borrowing by crowing about the province having no net debt – this is an apparent reference to the heritage fund – is he saying that

borrowing is okay as long as it stays under \$15 billion? How deep into debt is the minister planning to take us?

2:00

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member might want to have a discussion with some of the financial experts in our community and in our province, because I have. Over the last six months I've been talking with a number of those financial experts. I've also been talking to Albertans, and Albertans want us to do things like highway 63 now, not defer it till some point in the future. Albertans want us to build the postsecondary spaces that they need today, not defer it till sometime in the future. Albertans want us to build the schools in their cities, like Airdrie, like Edmonton, now, not defer them to sometime in the future.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want this government to live within our means. The minister has told us that revenue projections were based upon average prices established by multiple outside experts, but if the experts are proven wrong, as they have been, the minister doesn't seem to have a real plan for reducing spending. If oil prices go up, they spend. If prices go down, they borrow. When will this government stop blowing through our savings?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, again, I would ask the hon. members opposite to pay attention when we do the first-quarter update or when I do the second-quarter update. They would know that we did announce further increases in in-year savings for this year. I would also suggest that it's incredible that a party that's talking about this would stand up, most of their members, over the last few days and talk about nothing but more spending in their constituencies, more than a billion dollars. Where's the balance there? Where's the priority?

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier says that she is committed to human rights, especially as it affects the gay and lesbian community in Alberta. She has even scored big points by taking part in the Pride Week festivities in both Edmonton and Calgary. My question is to the Premier. Why has the Premier consistently avoided removing the odious section 11.1 from the Alberta Human Rights Act?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there is not a doubt in the mind of any Albertan that we support choices and lifestyle and people who live whatever way that they want to in this province with respect to sexual orientation. What I will say with respect to all of the work that is being done for the first time by this government is that there is a comprehensive consultative process going on with members of the gay and lesbian community to ensure that we have a fully comprehensive legislative, regulatory, and policy framework that respects all human rights in this province.

Ms Blakeman: Well, not while that section is still there.

Back to the Premier: could the Premier please explain why during the election the Premier sold herself and her government as progressives, especially to the under-40 voters, yet flip-flopped fast in refusing to remove that very section and continuing to propose legislation that upholds racial and religious practices but won't even name sexual orientation and gender identity?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, without speaking specifically to the legislation that is before this House at the moment, what we did in

this election is that we spoke to Albertans about being a progressive and inclusive and respectful government. What that means is that everyone in Alberta has rights that need to be protected. All rights need to be balanced. We have to be consistent with our Constitution. This government will stand up for that and will not be subject to political stunts.

Ms Blakeman: Balancing human rights. Hmm.

Back to the Premier: how does the Premier explain the proposed government policy which allows parents to teach their children at home that homosexuality is a sin and that being gay or lesbian is bad but denies teachers the ability to even talk about sexuality in the classroom without the Human Rights Commission sword of Damocles hanging over their heads?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, that is a characterization that does nothing but provoke fear and intolerance in all parts of this discussion. [interjections] We are proud of the fact that in this province we have legislation that is consistent with our Bill of Rights, with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and ensures that we do do what every court in this country does, which is truly balance the rights of all Canadians. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I cautioned you yesterday about interjections, and I'm going to caution you again today.

The hon. leader of the New Democratic opposition.

Cost of Injections by Pharmacists

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's flu season, and Albertans are lining up to get their shots, but this year pharmacies are making extra cash providing those shots. Last year, before Daryl Katz, the billionaire pharmacy magnate, saved the PCs' bacon in the election, pharmacists were given \$10.93 per injection. This year pharmacies are getting \$20 per shot. My question is to the Premier. Can she explain why pharmacies now receive almost double what they did one year ago?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the answer to that question is very simple. We as a government made a commitment early in our mandate last year to begin to pay pharmacists for the services that they are legally enabled to do under their scope of practice. That includes injections and immunizations. If the hon. member wants to stand up and make an argument to Albertans as to why they should not be able to access flu immunization from their pharmacists, I'd be more than happy to listen to that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The point is that the government after the election nearly doubled what they were being paid.

Given that the province pays physicians' offices just \$10.30 per shot and pharmacies twice that for exactly the same service, can the Premier explain this sweetheart deal for pharmacies in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had followed the improvements in pharmacy care that were announced by this government and took effect on July 1, he would know that as of that date a new pharmacy compensation framework for the province was introduced, wherein pharmacists are paid \$20 per interjection for drugs or for vaccines. He would further know that

this government in our last budget reduced the prices that we pay in our public plans for generic drugs in order to fund that very service, which Albertans report as tremendously convenient and effective.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the fourth party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're well aware of how the government has sweetened the deal for pharmacies, including those owned by Mr. Katz.

Given the financial benefit of this sweetheart deal to Mr. Katz among others, does the Premier acknowledge that her government has placed itself in a serious conflict of interest by accepting a massive donation from Mr. Katz and his family and his associates?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, for the last three years we've been discussing how to improve health care, and we've listened to Albertans. What Albertans have told us is: ensure that all health care professionals are able to exercise their skills to the best of their ability and to their full professional qualifications. What we did this year in terms of making changes to the pharmacies act was in response to listening to Albertans. This is a sweetheart deal for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Election Finances Legislation

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given your instructions yesterday, I've drafted my questions accordingly. I will table documents later today that show that almost \$1,800 of illegal donations were made by a prohibited corporation, Bow Valley College. This government's election law, which was put in place when the Premier was Justice minister, prevents the Chief Electoral Officer from making his findings of wrongdoing public. Will the Premier amend the legislation now, or is she fine with the status quo of Albertans being kept in the dark on who has made or received illegal donations in this province?

Mr. Olson: On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that we have legislation coming, so I suggest that he stay tuned.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, given that the election finance laws have already gained the reputation as the worst in Canada and given that the Chief Electoral Officer has already found dozens of illegal donations made to a political party, can the minister explain why Alberta is the only province that refuses to publicly disclose all illegal donations and fines, or will this so-called open and transparent government force Albertans to use expensive FOIP requests to find out?

2:10

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, that characterization may only be in that member's mind and some of his colleagues'. We have very good legislation in this area, and we're constantly trying to improve it. We have taken recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer after the last election and are considering them. It's a work-in-progress. I ask the member to be patient and see what's coming.

Mr. Saskiw: That's just not true. You should stick to the ag department.

I have a very simple question for you. Will this minister do the right thing and commit today to introduce legislation to retroactively

publicly disclose all illegal donations and fines in the past seven years, or will this cover-up continue? Simple.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to give such an undertaking. That's a ridiculous request. Now, I don't know why he is referring to me as the agriculture minister in this particular context because, obviously, I'm answering on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Again, I say that we have legislation that's coming, and his questions will be answered at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Health Care Costs

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Institute for Health Information has just released their report on the national health expenditure trends dated from 1975 to 2012. On a per capita basis Alberta spends the second-highest amount on health care amongst provinces, second only to Newfoundland. Now, as with all government expenditures Albertans expect good return on their money for this kind of investment. To the Minister of Health: can the minister tell us why we are spending well above the national average on health care in this province, and is this investment actually making for better health outcomes in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that we lead Canada in per capita health spending is because we have been fortunate enough in this province to have the finances to pay for infrastructure, technology, and other improvements that Albertans depend on and benefit from each and every day. What's interesting about the hon. member's question is that the cost drivers in health care have changed according to this report. Whereas in the past drugs, for example, and hospital costs were the key drivers in the health system, it is things such as physician costs and other factors that are leading the increase in costs today.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, also to the Minister of Health: can the minister tell us what we are doing to get a handle on these ever-increasing expenditures here in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, one excellent example is the question that was asked earlier this afternoon with respect to pharmacists. We are working with physicians and nurses and pharmacists and other providers to ensure that they have the opportunity to practise to the full scope of their training and expertise. This, of course, allows physicians in particular to be freer to deal with more complex cases, see greater numbers of patients, and lend their extra expertise to the benefit of a wider number of patients.

Dr. Starke: The final supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this summer the salaries and compensation packages of senior executives at AHS were made public. Is this the reason why our health care costs are so high?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, interestingly, as a percentage of total health spending Alberta has the lowest administration costs in Canada, at 3.2 per cent. When it comes to executive compensation, the Alberta Health Services Board looks carefully at similar compensation across the country and in North America. We must continue to ensure that health administrators and physicians and, in fact, all of our providers are paid competitively, that we continue to offer the best suite of resources in Canada for them to practise, and that we truly empower them to deliver the quality of care they wish to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Ferruginous Hawk Habitat

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impressive ferruginous hawk is currently considered endangered by the Alberta Wildlife Act and the federal Species at Risk Act. This spring, just prior to breeding season, 16 nesting platforms were torn apart to facilitate the construction of a power line project which had not yet been approved. Albertans expect a threatened and endangered species would not suffer from the incompetence of a government. Will the SRD minister be investigating who exactly is responsible for this avoidable – no – atrocious act?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, the platforms were removed before the nesting season began to prevent the disruption of the birds during construction and are scheduled to be re-erected this fall. In fact, ATCO has been working in collaboration with AESRD and with the Special Areas Board and with Dr. Schmutz with regard to this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the program director, David DePape, describes this as an officially induced error, which we all know is a blatant breach of the act, will the minister do the right thing and pursue charges prescribed under these acts for the parties responsible?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Schmutz, who is the hawk expert – I'll just quote some of the stuff that he has said. He has stated that he is extremely pleased – let me repeat: extremely pleased – with the efforts that ATCO Electric, AESRD, and the SAB have undertaken to ensure that the nesting platforms are properly replaced, new locations for the platforms have been determined, more locations have been added, and new platforms and poles are being considered to replace the old ones. This comes from the doctor, the expert himself.

Mr. Strankman: Given that Wildrose believes in environmental stewardship and in actually protecting the environment, both the plants and wildlife, when will the minister take the appropriate action to ensure that these threatened endangered species will not suffer from this again?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that last question quite amusing, especially after yesterday's comments from, let me see, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks with regard to a question with regard to the SSRP consultation to make sure we wouldn't put more conservation areas in place. We work very hard. We work with the species at risk board, and we work with experts to make sure that we are given good advice on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

New School Construction in Beaumont and Leduc

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency growth continues to be both a blessing and a curse. Statistics Canada has

recognized Beaumont as one of the 20 fastest growing communities in the country, where 25 per cent of the population is under the age of 15. Leduc is not far behind. As a result, the schools are bursting at the seams in both Leduc and Beaumont. To the Minister of Education: can the minister outline what steps he's taking to alleviate these pressures?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the pressure this member mentioned is faced by many communities right across this province and is something that this government takes very seriously. That's why this Premier has made such a commitment toward school infrastructure. You should know that either just completed or under way there are approximately 88 projects totalling a billion dollars. That's going to create about 27,000 new spaces for students around the province, and that includes two K to 9 schools, one public and one Catholic, in Beaumont. The other nice thing I'd say about that school project is that they're going to be built together, and they're sharing a library and a gymnasium. That's the direction we need to go, and I commend those school divisions for doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: while this new joint facility in Beaumont will be very welcomed by that community, can the minister share any plans that might offer some comfort to the residents and students of Leduc?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I understand that many Albertans, many communities are eager to learn about the next round of capital, where and when, and I want to thank this member for bringing those two school boards to meet with me so they could relay their concerns and their frustrations to me personally. All I can say to those communities is: we hear you, and we're working as hard as we can to get the next round of capital out and planned. The pressures that these communities are feeling are going to play very strongly in the considerations in the coming months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that by the time these schools are opened, they will likely be full – and this is something that we've seen in many communities – is your department using any forecasting methodology to allow these schools to have a few years before they reach full capacity?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the answer is: yes, we are. We're working closely with the school boards. When we're looking at the size and scope of the new schools, we take, essentially, their requests, but we work with them to establish school enrolment projections based on pressures and based on information from StatsCan and Health and others. Overall we've done a good job on the projections, but we just haven't been able to roll out capital fast enough as a province to keep up with the growth because people are moving to Alberta because Alberta is the place to be.

Lobbying Government

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: In question period yesterday and, in fact, today we heard the Minister of Finance admit that the Katz Group asked the government to provide funding for an NHL arena and also for a change in casino licence. To the Minister of Finance: are we to believe that the only time the Katz Group or Rexall group or any

of those like affiliates talked to you or a member of your government was at this cocktail party?

2:20

Mr. Horner: Well, I said it was at a social event, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the question was?

The Speaker: Second question.

Mr. Hehr: I'll try that again. In your answer you said that the only time Daryl Katz asked you about arena funding or a casino licence was at a cocktail party. Was this the only time you or any member of your government was in fact lobbied about these projects?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I didn't say cocktail party, first of all. The request was for us to consider. The response was very quick. We're not going to consider any new applications for different kinds of casino licences, not just from the Katz Group but from any of the other groups. In fact, there's currently a moratorium on new casino applications, as the hon. member probably well knows. The AGLC is part of that.

If the hon. member is asking me if I know of anybody else in government that in the last three or four years has talked to them, I couldn't answer that question.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I guess I can't figure that out. Looking at the lobbyist registry, it doesn't reference Daryl Katz, the Katz Group, Rexall, or any other affiliated entity. Is this an admission that you guys have a failed lobbyist registry? When will you fix this failed lobbyist registry if this is the case?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it wasn't Daryl Katz himself that wandered into the Legislature and asked me about this. There was a group that was representing themselves as part of the Katz Group. There are a number of individuals in that group. I have already undertaken to bring that forward for the hon. member.

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

Whistle-blower Protection

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For too long workers in Alberta have been silent because they fear losing their job. This government claims the importance of transparency and accountability over and over, so much so that they even named one of their ministries after it. Albertans want to know that this ministry is more than a label on an empty box. To the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: will he guarantee that Albertans who have been silenced in the past can now speak without fear?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has made a commitment that we'll be the most open and transparent government in Canada, and that's exactly what we're doing. We've produced the most robust expense disclosure policy in Canada. Today we're introducing whistle-blower legislation, and we're going to be introducing a review of the FOIP Act. This is an accountable and transparent government.

The Speaker: Hon. member, just a reminder that the Speaker's chair has not moved; it is still up here.

Mr. Bilous: I guess that accessibility doesn't count for my staff, who were refused entrance to briefing statements.

Mr. Speaker, given that the XL Foods recall was most certainly preventable and given that workers publicly expressed concern about food safety at the plant after the recall, will the minister commit to private-sector coverage for whistle-blowers? If not, why not?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, we are today introducing whistle-blower legislation. I'm looking forward to a robust debate on that issue. We're going to take all of the concerns that are expressed into account.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Alberta desperately needs strong whistle-blower legislation which will protect workers and the public and given that the only reason a company or government would ever fear strong whistle-blower protection is if they had something to hide, will the minister admit that the aim of this legislation is not to protect whistle-blowers but to protect the government from whistle-blowers?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member misunderstands. We are an open and accountable government. We're introducing whistle-blower legislation to protect employees from reprisal. That's exactly what we're doing. That's what this government has committed to doing, and that's what is going to happen.

Khalsa Credit Union

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, Khalsa Credit Union has successfully served Alberta's vibrant Sikh community since 1995. There is now an ongoing attempt by a group, including several members of the Minister of Service Alberta's family, to take over governance of Khalsa at an upcoming board election, as is their right to do. However, during this pre-election period Alberta's credit union regulator has threatened sanctions against Khalsa's current board based largely upon the complaints by the group seeking to take the board over. To the Minister of Finance: why does the credit union regulator appear to be taking sides in what should be a democratic board election?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, this should not be brought to the floor of this House because the credit union regulator, or CUDGC, is the group that's responsible for ensuring that the credit unions are viable, that they are governed appropriately. If there are issues relating to governance or to the viability of a credit union, it is not for this House or, for that matter, political influence as is now being brought up in this House to be even part of this.

The Speaker: I'm going to check the *Hansard* later, but, hon. member, proceed with your first supplemental.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, here's the rub, and it's entirely relevant as you will see. Mr. Speaker, given that the group leading the takeover attempt of the Khalsa Credit Union board according to current board members is being led by members of the Minister of Service Alberta's family, which, I repeat, is completely their right if done democratically, will the minister agree that in order to avoid even the appearance of a conflict, the Minister of Service Alberta must recuse himself from any and all involvement or communications on this matter until the issue is resolved democratically?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's somewhat appalling, frankly, that the hon. member, who is the Finance critic, would actually bring this to become politicized in this Assembly when we are not, nor were we, involved in any discussions. I have not been involved in any discussions with the credit union – I can't recall the name he brought forward – and I don't think it's appropriate for it to be on the floor of this House.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Khalsa board has FOIPed a petition sent to the Minister of Service Alberta that contained complaints about the current Khalsa board and was signed by many members of the minister's family. Given that this petition may have been used by the credit union regulator as a basis for threatened sanctions against the current Khalsa board, will the Minister of Service Alberta immediately grant this FOIP request rather than delaying it until 2013, as is currently being indicated, so that the minister cannot be accused of delaying the FOIP request due to his obvious conflict of interest in this matter?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I won't even dignify how disgusting and how low this member goes in his politics. He picks up the phone, calls, and says: get involved or else I'm taking this issue up in QP. So you want us to politically interfere in a matter or else you're going to accuse us of political interference? What's next? Are you going to intervene in elections at the Sikh temple? Is that what's next?

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the FOIP request was made. The petition was released. The signatures on a petition cannot be released. This is so low that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. [interjections] Hon. Member for Sherwood Park, you have the floor.

Physician Services Agreement

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta physicians have been without a contract for 19 months now. Previous agreements in principle have expired, things seem to be dragging out, and Albertans have the right to know what is going on. My question is to the Minister of Health. What is the status of the negotiations?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I first want to make clear . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Please, let's stop the discussions going across the floor here. Hon. Member for Airdrie, you're on my list now for today. Minister of Human Services, you're on my list today as well. Please, no exchange of conversations across the floor.

The Minister of Health had the floor, and he was attempting to answer a question.

Physician Services Agreement (continued)

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by making it clear that our government is extremely proud of the work physicians do for Albertans and the important role they play in delivering very high-quality health care in this province.

It is true that we have been without an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association for about 19 months now. Last week

I presented on behalf of government our best offer to the Alberta Medical Association, and my understanding is that they're currently considering that offer.

Ms Olesen: Also to the Minister of Health: what does the minister mean when he says that government has presented its best offer?

2:30

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I mean by that is that we have carefully looked at all of the issues that have been discussed over the last 19 months during the negotiations. We looked at the two agreements in principle, which were not completed. As a government we presented our best response to the issues that were raised by the Alberta Medical Association while at the same time looking at mechanisms and opportunities to work collaboratively to further health outcomes that we desire on behalf of Albertans. These include things like better primary health care, better use of other health professionals in our health care system, and a host of other improvements that we know are critical to health for Albertans.

Ms Olesen: To the same minister: what is government hoping to achieve with a new contract with physicians?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we intend to preserve our position as the province that pays the best for physicians across the country. As the hon. member may be aware, we currently pay the highest in the country, approximately 29 per cent above the national average. We want to continue to offer the best facilities and services to support physicians, and we want to make the best possible use of nonphysician professionals, who can offer a great deal to Albertans as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Electricity Transmission Facility Costs

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest respect and civility, to the Minister of Energy. Recent data reveals that the cost to build a transmission line in Alberta is more than double the cost it takes to build the same transmission line in neighbouring jurisdictions. The cable, steel, and labour all come from the same pool of manufacturers and companies that specialize in this industry. Can the Minister of Energy explain to this Assembly why it costs twice as much to build a transmission line in Alberta as in neighbouring jurisdictions?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very interesting theoretical construct the hon. member makes given that the lines that he is discussing day to day are actually only just starting to be constructed and that some of them aren't constructed yet. I'll look forward to the evidence, but I can tell you that the Alberta Utilities Commission has direct responsibility to oversee the cost structure of transmission lines. There are appropriate public policy mechanisms in place to address this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's transmission cost monitoring committee, that is tasked with monitoring the costs of these transmission lines, can be denied access to certain financial information and given that companies are not required to provide this committee's financial information

upon request, how can Albertans have any confidence that proper cost controls are in place?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the Alberta Utilities Commission has oversight of this directly and can seek all of that information on behalf of the people of Alberta to ensure that Albertans are getting the best value possible. I would simply note in passing that the context here is that these are important infrastructure lines that ensure we have a robust electrical system in this province. It supports over \$8 billion in wholesale-provided electricity costs in this province, and it's a \$300 billion economy that this is supporting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to evidence that proves that fact.

Why did this government sign a multibillion-dollar no-bid contract to AltaLink to build a transmission line, that is not needed, given that the sole owner of AltaLink was the subject of two RCMP investigations and they're under investigation for fraud, money laundering, and corruption of a public official in North Africa?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the regulatory or the legal construct in North Africa is anything near similar to what we have in the province of Alberta. I would suggest that the hon. member should make that allegation outside of this House.

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

WCB Coverage for Foreign Workers

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-Fort includes a large industrial area where tens of thousands of hard-working Albertans perform their tasks every day. The well-being of workers is high on my attention. There are a large number of foreign workers in our province contributing greatly to the economy. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Services. How is WCB coverage provided for foreign workers in case of serious injury in respect to treatment and recovery in Canada and in their home countries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any worker who is covered by the Workers' Compensation Board is covered in the same manner, whether they're a foreign worker or whether they're a landed immigrant or whether they're a Canadian citizen. Regardless of their status, if they're covered by the Workers' Compensation Board because of the place that they are working, they have the same coverage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: given that the foreign worker was seriously injured at work, what help is provided to an injured worker while being hospitalized long term in Canada and during his recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the foreign worker would have the same coverage as a Canadian worker or an Albertan worker, so the Workers' Compensation Board would

make provision with respect to salary replacement if that was appropriate and, certainly, would make provision with regard to the medical requirements of that worker. The job of the Workers' Compensation Board is to assist a worker, regardless of where they come from, in recovering and getting back to work as quickly as possible and to provide income support for any income loss that's incurred as a result of the injury.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: given that the foreign worker's injuries are permanent and may mean he cannot perform the same task and that his work visa has expired, what help is provided for an injured or disabled foreign worker when unable to perform the jobs specified by the work permit?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, for any worker, if there is a long-term disability or a long-term inability to return to work or to return to that work, the income support provisions of the workers' compensation program would kick in. Those income support provisions would follow that worker, whether they had to return to their home country or whether they were staying here. A temporary foreign worker can move from one job to another under appropriate circumstances. The temporary foreign worker program is a federal program, so we work with the federal government to assist temporary foreign workers when they need to change jobs. If that is appropriate for the individual involved . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Capital Infrastructure Planning

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to open the *Edmonton Journal* this morning and see that the government is taking another Wildrose idea and is planning to release a long-term version of infrastructure in the next budget. Hopefully, it will be a public document. The Wildrose has long been advocating for this infrastructure priority list so that Alberta families and Alberta communities can plan the future. Will the Minister of Infrastructure commit to and make public how we will prioritize projects around items such as transportation versus schools . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I've been working hard with my colleagues all summer in all departments to bring together a capital infrastructure plan going forward. I'm also working with my colleagues in Finance and Treasury Board so that when we come up with our infrastructure plan, we'll have the capital finances that go with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. We would like that public infrastructure list. We've been talking about it for a while, but there's more to this. Given that the Deputy Premier was in Medicine Hat using an infrastructure announcement to roll out failed PC candidates and PC MLAs from Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Sherwood Park as local representatives, why won't the minister take politics out of this infrastructure planning and release this detailed priority list based on Albertan families and community needs and priorities?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I know the different departments have their three-year capital plans. I think they're posted on their websites. I'm working with the Finance minister, and when he releases his budget next spring, we'll have those plans with that. We continue to invest in public infrastructure to ensure Albertans have the quality of life they deserve now and into the future.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that hard-working Alberta contractors have made it clear that they are fed up with this government's process of awarding multiple projects to a single bidder, without a proper competitive process, will the minister end this practice and give all Albertan contractors a chance to bid on projects so taxpayers and Alberta families can get the best deal for the new infrastructure projects they so desperately need?

2:40

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what this member is talking about. We have public tenders that go out when we do our projects, and every contractor in the province can bid on them if they're qualified. I spent the last couple of days meeting with infrastructure partners at their convention, talking to them about these issues. It's open and transparent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by the Member for Little Bow.

Highway 15

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congestion on the highway 15 bridge into the city of Fort Saskatchewan is a significant issue for my constituents. Unfortunately, at this moment we don't have a viable alternative option to help accommodate the increasing traffic flow in this area and to reduce the congestion. To the Minister of Transportation: what is our government doing in regard to decreasing congestion in and around Fort Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is currently a planning study under way for long-term improvements to highway 15 east of Fort Saskatchewan up to highway 830. Also, construction is under way on the northeast leg of the Anthony Henday, which does include a new North Saskatchewan River crossing upstream from Fort Saskatchewan that is expected to be complete in the fall of 2016. That will help mitigate congestion issues in Fort Saskatchewan.

As we review the entire transportation network in the province, we consider the volumes, the safety records and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. That bridge that you're referring to is, certainly, south of Fort Saskatchewan. It does not address the issue, nor does it address the issue of the heavy loads, oversize loads. What is the plan, please?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, a route study was completed earlier this year, and we're working with the agencies, the industry to assess the viability, practicality, and cost of various alternative routes for oversize loads. The transportation of oversize loads is important to our continued economic growth, and it's essential that everyone on our highways has the ability to travel safely and efficiently. As we build these oversize load corridors, it will take traffic and congestion off the alternate routes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: could I have some indication that this study will be timely and will be made public in an efficient manner to the residents of Fort Saskatchewan?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the hon. member asking the question has been dogged in asking this question to me outside of the House. As such, I'm sure the hon. member will continue to be dogged, and I won't be allowed to forget, even if I wanted to, about this particular issue. I can assure the hon. member that we will get the report out as fast as we are able.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that concludes question period today. As a result of tightening up our questions and answers, we were able to recognize six more questions and six more answers than yesterday. Good job to all of you. Thank you.

In a few seconds from now I will call on the Member for Red Deer-North to give her member's statement.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Irlen Syndrome

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, one of my greatest joys in life is to snuggle up in a comfy chair with a good book, to read my way into an adventure and become a great explorer in the depths of Africa with Dr. Livingstone or a great space explorer racing through time with Captain Kirk or Han Solo or to become a faithful and loyal friend to Harry Potter or Frodo Baggins. Reading is one of life's greatest adventures, and at the same time it is the greatest tool there is in the quest for knowledge and success. It is, therefore, one of the most important learning experiences that a child can have.

Imagine having a visual perceptual symptom that causes you to see a snowstorm on a written page, as Emily in the University of Alberta study saw, or to see words that move up and down and off the page, as 10-year-old Kaden saw, or to see words in sentences that are blurry, like seven-year-old Wyatt sees, or watching the words pop out of the page, like nine-year-old Champ sees. Imagine the frustration and anxiety that arise when you realize that you can't read as fast or as effectively as others in your class. The scientific name for this syndrome is scotopic sensitivity syndrome, and the common name is Irlen syndrome. This syndrome is a neurological impairment that impacts the brain's ability to accurately process images. When present, Irlen's causes word and number distortions that prevent a child from reading properly.

The good news is that those with Irlen's can be helped with prescribed coloured, filtered lenses that help to filter light differently. My guests today in the gallery, certified Irlen's diagnosticians, certified Irlen's screeners, parents of children with Irlen's, and children with Irlen's, can all attest to this condition and how these noninvasive treatment methods have changed their lives. It is my hope that we can raise awareness about this neurological syndrome and assist children with Irlen's. Mr. Speaker, in doing so, we can improve the lives of many people across Alberta, allowing them to fulfill their dreams and giving them the opportunity to experience one of life's greatest joys, reading.

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

Election Finances Legislation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Katz donations fiasco of the past week provides a case study in the need for stronger election finances legislation. Alberta has the highest individual limit in Canada, \$30,000 in an election year. As the fiasco has shown us, the legislation provides ample opportunity for parties to manipulate the numbers so they appear to stick to limits while far exceeding them. The New Democrats have long been the only voice in Alberta calling for a ban on corporate and union donations and for a lower individual donation limit.

Unsurprisingly, in the last week in this Assembly we've heard repeatedly from this Justice minister that changes to the election finances act don't include a reduction of the \$30,000 limit or a change to the loopholes. With this government, Mr. Speaker, it's a foregone conclusion that there will be no ban on corporate donations.

The ability of corporations and wealthy Albertans to purchase influence with this government is something that needs to change immediately. Albertans need a government elected by citizens, not dollars. Middle-class Albertans want a hard-working, transparent, and ethical government. What do the dollars of corporations and wealthy PC donors mean to the average Alberta family? Corruption, complacency, and welfare for the wealthiest.

It's time to clean this house, Mr. Speaker. It's time for this Premier and her government to take responsibility for the legislation that they've created. When the election finances amendment act is introduced in the House, the New Democrats will be seeking significant changes to it. We need strong and principled election finances legislation on this issue. It is the only way to protect our democracy and finally have a government that cares about the needs of middle-class Albertans.

Thank you.

Read In Week

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, even in today's world of texting and technology such as I'm using, nothing compares to a good book. That's why I'm pleased to stand today to highlight a great event that happened in Edmonton and area high schools earlier this month. Read In Week is a celebration of reading and the difference it can make in our lives.

Reading opens us up to a world of imagination. Through a good book we can stand toe to toe with a tyrannosaurus rex, fly a rocket, solve mysteries, or learn why the sky is blue. Events like Read In Week remind us of the magic of a good book and the joy of reading and being read to. From October 1 to 5 schools opened their doors to scores of volunteers and several members of this very Legislature, who joined classes in order to share a good book.

For those of us with children or grandchildren, we know the importance of reading to them. Reading helps our kids to be better learners. They come to the classroom with expanded minds, new perspectives, and knowledge. Reading inspires students to be engaged thinkers who are creative and innovative. It helps them understand language, develop problem-solving skills, and appreciate the world beyond their doorsteps.

Through events like Read In Week and with the participation of students, parents, teachers, and the whole community we can all do our part in ensuring literacy flourishes now and in Alberta's future. Congratulations to everyone involved in this valuable

initiative, and thank you for your dedication to reading and literacy for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of this, I will be tabling five copies of the book *The Gophers in Farmer Burrows' Field* by Mr. Mike Boldt, whom I previously introduced. A children's book has never been tabled in this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

2:50

Ferruginous Hawk Habitat

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the prairie grasslands of Alberta a gentleman by the name of Dr. Josef Schmutz has dedicated the last 28 years to the recovery of the ferruginous hawk. The ferruginous hawk is the largest of its species in North America. This hawk is so big that it's often mistaken for an eagle. This bird of prey has been classified as endangered by the Alberta Wildlife Act, and it's classified as a schedule 1 threatened species by the federal government.

Dr. Schmutz has spent the last 28 years building nesting sites and studying this majestic bird of prey in the Bullpound area, just south of Hanna. In late February and early March of this year Dr. Schmutz discovered that his work was undermined by the removal of 16 of these nesting sites built to help with the recovery and the breeding of these hawks. I know, Mr. Speaker, that this sounds like a reiteration of my questions earlier, but I view that it's of significant importance to the constituents of my area and to the species.

The removal of the nests was in direct violation of the federal Species at Risk Act, section 33, and that is the responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development to enforce. All this seems to be being brushed off, sir, based on a yet-to-be-approved transmission line. This is wrong. This is not how Albertans expect our endangered species to be treated. To date there has been no action taken by SRD to prosecute the parties responsible for this violation of the SARA or the Alberta Wildlife Act.

Environmental stewardship is critical to protect Alberta's ecological systems and to protect the environment. However, this is just the latest case of PC mismanagement when it comes to taking care of the environment. Instead of doing simple things like protecting the nests of endangered hawks, they're busy coming up with multimillion-dollar central planning schemes or spending billions of dollars of corporate welfare to pump hot air into the ground.

Thank you, sir, for your time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Bill 4

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to introduce Bill 4, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, 2012.

This legislation is due in large part to the diligent efforts of staff, some of whom are here today and who were recognized earlier. These are public servants who have worked tirelessly as this new legislation was developed. I thank them for their ongoing dedication to this and other projects they are working on.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act strengthens the commitment of this government to the values of accountability, transparency, transformation, and promoting confidence in the public sector. For this reason the act is focused on public-sector organizations as opposed to private corporations. We will be a leader in Canada because of the scope of the public sector covered by this protection. Public-sector entities that will be covered by this act include the Alberta public service; agencies, boards, and commissions; academic institutions; school boards; and health organizations. Other organizations may be included at a later date upon their request.

Mr. Speaker, there are possibly individuals working in these public-sector organizations that have observed wrongdoings in the course of their employment and may have feared reprisal for reporting them. This act will protect them by prohibiting retaliation in response to such disclosures and will establish a formal process through which reporting and investigations into wrongdoing can be conducted.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we get into tablings, let me remind you that tablings may be preceded by only a very brief description of the item you are tabling. Please do not use tablings as an opportunity to make a member's statement or a mini member's statement or what have you. Let's try and abide by that if we could today and see how it goes.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture to start us off.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, indeed, have four tablings today to table in the House. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the annual reports for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Wild Rose Foundation.

Last of all, I'll be tabling a list of Alberta children's authors relating to the theme of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talking about Alberta's children's books and Mike Boldt, who is, indeed, an Alberta author and illustrator. These Alberta writers have a collection of wonderful local literature that tells Alberta's story in beautifully illustrated books. I'm happy to table the list of authors.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to table five copies, the requisite number of books, of *The Gophers in Farmer Burrows' Field* by Mr. Mike Boldt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling six documents. The first one is the 2004 needs identification document, volume 1 and volume 2.

The second document is the 2009 10-year long-term plan.

The third document is the 2009 10-year long-term plan pamphlet.

The fourth document is the report, Canadian-Northwest-California Transmission Options Study.

The fifth document is the Critical Transmission Review Committee report.

The sixth document is the cost monitoring committee ministerial order with the three pertinent sections – 14, 21, and 23 – that I have referred to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Susan Tripp. Susan Tripp has asked me to table this and explain very briefly that this was a situation where her husband hurt his back and waited for an MRI for many months, 18 months actually, had to wait a great deal of time to see a specialist, and then was told the surgery was in B.C., but he couldn't get it there. It's a heartbreaking story.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I agree. I'm sure it is. If you could just tighten up the tabling as requested, that would be appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Anyway, he was not able to receive that treatment in due time and wasn't able to have it in Alberta. As I've heard tablings last an hour here sometimes, I hope that that would be sufficient, that she's now on the record. Here are five copies.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you for that observation. The reason I made the comment I did today was because of some tablings you had made yesterday, which I thought exceeded the normal time frame for tablings. Please understand that we are one of few jurisdictions that actually does allow these types of tablings. There are other jurisdictions that don't allow them at all, so it's a privilege to do a tabling. I would ask you, please: let's try and just tighten them up. That's all I'm asking. Thank you. You have a second tabling?

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Yes. The second tabling is from Ms Helen Erickson, and it's regarding a very lengthy note, again a very sad story. To be very brief, she would like to see regulation of private facilities that treat people with addictions. There are regulations for public treatment centres but not for private treatment centres, and she would like to see that, so a tabling in that respect.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce five requisite copies of a letter dated July 11, 2012, to the Wildrose caucus from Bow Valley College in which they outlined various donations made to the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just table five copies of pictures of the endangered species animal that I was speaking about today, and it relates to my presentation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Transportation three-year construction plan, 2012 to 2015. Once again, today in the House, though the question has been answered before, opposition asked where to find the priority list for what's been approved. Since they can't seem to find their way to transportation.alberta.ca, I thought I would make it easy.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please. You know, this is what gets the House going. It really does. I'm going to ask – this is my first admonition in this respect with regard to members' statements. However, it is 3 o'clock, and I'm recognizing the hon. Government House Leader now.

3:00

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know whether there are further tablings, but I would ask for unanimous consent to allow the completion of the Routine if there are.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has asked for unanimous consent to proceed beyond 3 o'clock in order to allow us to conclude Routine. Is anyone opposed to that motion? Please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Thank you. Let us proceed on. Are there other tablings?

If not, hon. members, I would like to make a tabling. Pursuant to section 63(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 95(1) of the Health Information Act, and section 44(1) of the Personal Information Protection Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This report covers the activities of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5 New Home Buyer Protection Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs or someone on behalf of the hon. minister. The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to move the New Home Buyer Protection Act for second reading.

The New Home Buyer Protection Act is a very – I was going to say long-awaited but, certainly, long-anticipated piece of legislation which will provide homebuyers in this province with a higher degree of protection. We've had in place in this province for a considerable period of time now a number of new-home warranty programs, but those new-home warranty programs have not provided ubiquitous coverage to all new-home buyers. This New Home Buyer Protection Act will in fact extend that coverage to ensure that every homebuyer in the province knows that they have, for one of the largest purchases they will make in their lives, the coverage, the protection of a new-home warranty.

The act goes to a considerable amount of effort to ensure that while it does not interfere with the ability of an individual

Albertan to build their own home or to be their own prime contractor, in the event that they do so and intend to resell the house into the market in future years, the new-home buyer's protection will extend to that house as well.

It's a fairly comprehensive act. It's an act which completes the circle with respect to new-home protection but protection which is absolutely necessary because, as I said, Mr. Speaker, a new-home purchase is probably one of the most significant purchases any Albertan will make in their life.

I would commend it to the House for second reading, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 1

Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012

The Chair: We will continue with the debate on amendment A1. Are there questions or comments to be offered? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill, my first opportunity. After submitting an amendment to the bill, I would like to suggest that I could proceed with some further discussion about the bill.

The Chair: Hon. member, we have amendment A1 on the floor. We'll deal with that amendment.

Dr. Swann: Thank you for your reminder, Mr. Chair. I stand in support of the amendment and will actually be taking the amendment further.

The diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder is a bona fide medical, psychological diagnosis. It's important that we recognize first responders – fire, police, emergency workers – for the work they have done and for the important stresses and strains and trauma that they themselves experience.

What strikes me as surprising is that we would in some way both intervene in a WCB process of assessing merits of the diagnosis of PTSD as they apply to an individual but also that we would single out particular professionals as being more legitimate in their response to these stresses with a particular diagnosis of PTSD.

The recognition in this amendment by the fourth party that this is critically important, that it be extended and equally accessible to child care workers, prison guards, those who see horrific things on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis and who have their own particular emotional response and their own particular ability to deal with the stresses and strains of their particular exposures based on their background, their own health, their own makeup is a fundamental responsibility of this Legislature, to ensure the fairness of this process and, in fact, not to interfere with the very no-fault insurance process that we have set up under the auspices of the WCB. They have competent professionals: physicians, nurses, psychologists. They have a team of those who assess people's claims. To begin to set up a two-tiered system around PTSD strikes me as being very inappropriate and very problematic.

What I would like to say is: surely in this Legislature we can acknowledge these important first responders. We can say thank

you, as the Member for Peace River did last night, to these first responders. We do not need to make a law to say thank you. We do not need to make a law to make it easier for certain professionals over others to get the compensation they deserve.

It's a travesty of the use of this Legislature to begin to pick and choose winners in this no-fault insurance program that has served reasonably well. It has many problems. It has many challenges. It has for some a weak appeal process. It has some lack of objectivity. It has some of the wrong incentives, that we can talk about another time. But we have set this no-fault insurance organization there to ensure that we compensate people who are injured. In this case it's a particular injury we call PTSD. Why on earth would we distinguish between certain people who have PTSD and work in a certain profession and make it somehow easier for them to get compensation than other groups?

It makes no sense, Mr. Chairman. It is going to embarrass us as a government to do this. It will come back to haunt us. It will create rivalries and antagonisms and hard feelings across our professional sectors. To be prejudging the role of the Workers' Compensation Board and their competence in defining what is compensable and what is not compensable PTSD is beyond the scope of this Legislature. We should not be dabbling in this. If we're going to do it, at least extend to those professionals we know suffer from PTSD and have submitted claims equal to the number of claims that have been submitted by first responders: in the child care area, in the peace officer area, in the prison guard area, in many other areas.

3:10

Really, I will be moving on after this debate to ask the Legislature, if we're going to go down this road – and I don't think it's a good decision to go down this road – we must simply say that we want to ensure that all professionals, all people who are under Workers' Compensation Board coverage be assessed equally, fairly, and responsibly in relation to their compensability.

I cannot accept the bill as it's written. I can support an extension of the bill with other professionals included, including those that the member has promoted.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to amendment A1, presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I stand to speak in support of this amendment. I do believe that she has got it right on this, that the men and women who serve in our penitentiaries, both federal and provincial, deserve the same sort of presumptive care that we are offering to our first responders whether they be police, fire, or EMT. These men and women are faced with very serious situations on a daily basis. Some of the most, I guess, rough and tough people in our society are put in jails for a reason, and these naturally become environments that have necessity for first response whether it be a fight, whether it be someone getting – you know, maybe I see too many movies – shanked, or if they walk into a suicide.

I think that the evidence is there. When you look at the WCB and how many cases of correctional officers they have offered PTSD coverage for in the last two and a half years, it is equal to the number of firefighters or the number of police. I do not believe that including this segment of our population and calling them first responders and giving them the presumptive nature of this care is going to open the door for many other amendments, as some of the hon. members would like to see. But definitely in this instance, where men and women are putting their lives on the line

in first response, critical situations and their lives are in danger, I do believe – and it's completely reasonable for me to see that happening – that this is the type of amendment that will work well. I do believe that like our very strong and capable members of EMT, police, peace officers, and firefighters, we should recognize these individuals in this bill as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also rise, and I will be in favour of this bill.

An Hon. Member: Amendment.

Mr. Anglin: Hang on. I will be in favour of this bill, but when I look at this amendment – I just had a slight stall before I got to the amendment – I'm in favour of this amendment for a very technical reason.

As a former first responder what I'd like to do is tell this House and this Assembly that there really are two different types of first responders. There is the broader term, which is the very first person who shows up on the scene, and there are a number of first responders that would qualify for that. Then there are those first responders who show up to put their lives on the line. Those are the people who actually answer the call when they know it is a deadly situation that they are going into. Firefighters are one of those, police officers are another, and so are sheriffs. You may think that sheriffs just answer these calls when they are pulling someone over for a speeding ticket, but they are first on the scene in a number of deadly situations.

The correctional officers are no different except that their condition is actually significantly different than that of a sheriff or of a police officer. Having served as a police officer, I would never want to serve as a correctional officer. I don't like that idea of being confined with a bunch of deadly people in a locked-in place. I like my escape route to be clear to me.

The reality is this. Prison life is extremely dangerous. I have been privy to an example of actually turning over a prisoner who got away, got out from his restraints, and had to be physically restrained by multiple correctional officers, some of whom were harmed as a direct result. When two prisoners battle it out, which is often the case, it is the correctional officer who has to intervene. Weapons are generally manufactured. They're confronted with this every day. They are in harm's way when they go to work, and when trouble starts in a prison or in a correctional institution, they are the first responder.

To my colleague who introduced the motion: to me it is a very well-thought-out and significant motion to amend the definition of the individuals that would have this presumptive condition. Again, we're not talking about adding any other medical care. We're just talking about the presumption. In my opinion these people qualify as first responders more than some others and more than sometimes I did.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Chair. I'd like to speak in support of the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I could be wrong – and I wouldn't mind hearing from the other side if I'm missing this – but my understanding is that under this act

correctional officers in Alberta are covered by Bill 1. No, they're not either. Okay. So this is just an oversight of correctional members both by the feds and the province.

They're covered, but there's not a presumption that any posttraumatic stress disorder that is diagnosed is because of their job, and therefore it's a little bit more difficult for them to get coverage. I think that it makes sense. I do concur in the idea that correctional officers should be put on the same playing field along with other first responders like firefighters, like police officers, and so forth. I think it's just as dangerous a job in those prison environments.

I don't see the harm in this. I mean, this is pretty basic. This would give those folks peace of mind, especially in that culture. Every culture is different, and I don't pretend to know what the culture of corrections officers is. I've never been one, and I've never been in jail yet. [interjections] That's right. That's right.

My guess is that it's much like other first responders, where it's very difficult for those folks – please, hon. members, do stand if you'd like to speak to this amendment as well – to come forward and admit that they have a problem even if they've been diagnosed. So I think that this would give them that protection. It would allow them to be treated for PTSD in a very quick manner or a very efficient manner when compared to having to prove that it was from their job that they were suffering this diagnosis and so forth.

I think it's clear that they're going to see and hear stuff everyday that, you know, is just going to be very disturbing. They're going to be dealing with folks who have in a lot of cases killed other people, have violated young people, have done all kinds of heinous crimes, and they're going to hear some graphic details on that. They're going to see things. Some of them are going to see suicides. They're going to see drug deals. They're going to see all these different things, and then they're going to try to break those things up in a lot of cases.

So I think that it's very important that we recognize that this is a good amendment, that this is something that will certainly bring correctional service officers up to the same level as our other first responders, where they should be. I really think that the cost of this will be quite negligible. I mean, we're already going the extra mile. We're covering peace officers, we're covering sheriffs, and we're covering police officers, firemen, making an automatic presumption, which is good.

3:20

I agree that we can't be going into other categories; for example, social service workers. Fantastic people. There are times when the job of social workers has the effect of giving them PTSD in certain circumstances if they're dealing with a multitude of terrible situations that some social workers have to deal with. But I think there are enough social workers that aren't in those situations where they have to deal with it that it would be very hard to say: okay; we're just going to assume that if anybody who is a social worker has PTSD, it's because of their work. I think that would be too much of a leap to make. I think that should be proved on an individual-by-individual basis. In some cases it absolutely, clearly would be from their work.

I think that's the difference between a first responder and someone who is not a first responder. I think that corrections workers at correctional facilities are on the front lines. They do have to respond to things immediately and see things and are involved in altercations and so forth that must be very, very difficult and in some ways even more difficult than for a lot of folks who are first responders.

Yeah, I think this would be a great amendment. I support it, and I hope that members of this Assembly would contemplate doing so as well when the time for a vote comes.

The Chair: I'll recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you. Members of the House, we in the government and, indeed, all law-abiding citizens of Alberta demand of our justice system that criminals are arrested, processed through the court system, and when found guilty, segregated from society. Then for the most part we put them out of our minds either consciously or subconsciously, sort of out of sight, out of mind. But they are not out of the sights and minds of our corrections officers. These men and women are our front line of defence. They protect us from these people, the very worst of our society. They deal with them every minute, every hour in every shift that they serve. To deny them the same treatment we have for police and firefighters and EMTs is just not right.

I support this amendment, and I would urge everyone else in the House to support it as well. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Government House Leader and then the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief. I just wanted to rise to speak and oppose this amendment. It's not a question of whether or not corrections officers do important work for us. Of course they do important work for us. The intention of Bill 1 is to provide presumptive coverage. The Workers' Compensation Board, under a policy that was adopted, I believe a year ago now, provides coverage for posttraumatic stress disorder for any worker who's covered by WCB who has posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of their work and their work conditions. The purpose of putting presumptive coverage in place for first responders is a recognition of the trauma that our first responders face as a regular part of their job. On a day-to-day basis police officers are responding to horrific situations. Certainly, emergency and medical technicians respond to vehicle accidents and respond to situations of trauma. Those are day-to-day occurrences in the course of their work.

We could go through and find each and every category of worker and say: in what percentage of their work might a person be expected to have a traumatic incident? Suffice it to say that that's not really the intention here. The intention is to start – as we did, actually, with the recognition of presumptive coverage for certain forms of cancer that occur in a firefighter's work, for example – with the presumptive coverage to cover the three areas where we know that people on a regular basis are faced with trauma in the course of their work, and we know that it has an impact on their lives. We know that most of the employers in those circumstances have programs in place, and even the employee work groups have processes in place to help each other deal with the tragedy, the trauma that they face every day, but it is an everyday expectation or occurrence.

In the case of the specific amendment with respect to corrections services one would assume that in a prison situation there's quite a controlled process. Yes, indeed, there are some events that happen from time to time. There are tragedies. There are situations where a prisoner might commit suicide, or there might be an altercation, but we wouldn't anticipate in that type of controlled circumstance that these would be the everyday occurrences that we might expect an emergency medical technician would have to face. So that's the difference here.

If we go on to anticipate some of the other areas that have been raised in the past few days, you know, such as social workers, I have a great deal of empathy for social workers. I think in our own ministry the people that work with us deal with some of the horrific things that children can face across the province. There's no question that there could be traumatic impact. Quite frankly, I'm not sure how some of those people actually do the jobs that they do for Albertans on a day-to-day basis. We really do appreciate the work that they do.

Again, we're getting into a situation – and here I would have to at my peril agree with the hon. Member for Airdrie – where you can't go through and sort of analyze the job on a day-to-day basis and say: how often do you expect that type of situation to be occurring in a nurse's or a social worker's life? Yes, there are other professions and occupations where people face trauma. There are other circumstances where something that's absolutely horrific might come into a person's life, and it may in fact cause posttraumatic stress disorder which needs to be dealt with and thus comes under the purview of workers' compensation.

I think we should be guided very carefully here, move forward carefully. The purpose of Bill 1 is to include our first responders. I think that that's where we should stick for the moment. We should see what kind of experiences we have. Perhaps at some point in time it would be appropriate to have a committee of the House look at this particular section and say who should be in and who should be out and for what reasons, but I don't think that we should just pick people and put them into the act because we think they have important jobs. All Albertans do important jobs. Some Albertans choose to work in areas that can be particularly stressful and sometimes traumatic.

Some Albertans act on our behalf on a day-to-day basis as first responders to go into the worst situations that we have and to assist Albertans when they're in those types of things. Those are the people that we're putting in this first iteration, at least, of presumptive coverage for PTSD, and I would encourage the House to consider a careful approach to this rather than a broad stroke of including some people and leaving other people out. Include the first responders that we know do this on a day-to-day basis on behalf of Albertans, and leave others for a closer examination, if people wish to, before a legislative committee or some other forum and then come back at a later date if that proves to be an appropriate addition.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Little Bow.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm certainly very interested in speaking in favour of and supporting this amendment to include corrections staff in Bill 1 and the benefits that Bill 1 outlines. You know, it's interesting how we have just heard that the government is encouraging us not to choose people, but in fact that's what they're doing here, making distinctions and leaving some people out, some members and some workers that by definition, by legal definition and certainly by what they actually do and experience in their jobs, are exactly the same as any other first responder.

The Criminal Code of Canada itself defines the prison wardens, deputy wardens, keepers, jailers, guards, and officers as peace officers, in fact, under the federal Corrections and Conditional Release Act, 1992. According to federal law these employees are, in fact, already in the same group as that which this bill is trying to encompass. Again, I find that to be, perhaps, an oversight, or

perhaps it's something that wasn't looked at as carefully as it should have been, but here we are in the Legislature with a great opportunity to include corrections officers under the coverage that Bill 1 suggests.

3:30

Also, the provincial Corrections Act, from our own laws, acts as though the duties in federal prisons are defined by federal legislation, so we're tied in that way, too. Within the prison environment there is absolutely no question that corrections officers are responding as the first responders to many traumatic incidents. They are left with very difficult, dangerous, and traumatizing duties, and they encounter violence on a very regular basis.

Statistics from the office of the correctional investigator provide us with a glimpse of the daily risks and incidents that doesn't sound too different, really, from a police officer and what they encounter on the outside. In 2011-2012, for example, 814 incidents were investigated by the correctional investigator, and the correctional investigator, I believe, was a former member of this Assembly. Of these incidents 84 involved emergency response teams, 600 used restraining devices, and a dozen incidents involved the use of firearms by correctional staff. By definition, by circumstance, in reality these are exactly the same incidents that we are trying to cover for other groups outside of a prison with this Bill 1. I say that corrections staff reasonably should belong to this group as well.

The quite unreasonable and illogical, I would suggest, exclusion of corrections officers from this legislation is a big concern to the workers that are actually doing the jobs themselves, including the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, of which we had a group delegation here just a few days ago. They know that their members fulfill all of the first responder responsibilities that take place in prisons. This legislation is not encompassing their members, and they consider it to be a grave oversight that has to be fixed with this amendment, which I believe we developed in consultation with them, in fact. It's not just coming out of the air.

If we don't accept this amendment, the province is making divisions and not treating all first responders in the same way and creating a patchwork system with a hierarchy of needs and coverage according to where people happen to be working, not whether they are, in fact, first responders and experiencing, potentially, trauma as a result. Workers in our prisons deserve the same presumptive coverage as all other first responders, and we certainly will fight vigorously and, I think, with quite a number of members here, maybe even from all sides, that would consider this amendment as a reasonable addition to what otherwise could be a very productive and useful bill and law here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you. I'm up to speak in favour of this amendment. I think corrections officers are key and crucial and also part of being first responders in this province. Again, as my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre stated, I mean, they deal with everything day to day on these issues also.

I think this is a great bill to begin with, this Bill 1, but I think we need to also identify all the peace officers in this province, who every day don't know exactly what they're walking into,

especially a sheriff or a corrections officer. For anybody that's had the opportunity to go into one of the fine facilities in our province, it's not for the weak of heart. I think that they definitely have their lives on the line also.

With the posttraumatic stress syndrome that we're trying to deal with here, I think this is something that we should be in support of also.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise again to speak to this amendment, that would include corrections officers under the presumptive coverage that is provided through Bill 1. I'm hoping at this point to have a little bit more of a back and forth with members of the government because I remain truly perplexed about why it is that corrections officers are excluded from this legislation. I will say that I've made in the past a couple of rhetorical suggestions that maybe what we were really doing was judging the victims or, you know, talking about sort of the photo op potential of the work that each group does, but I really didn't honestly think that that was what was going on. As I say, I remain perplexed about why corrections officers are not included.

Now, we will have a discussion further on with a different amendment about the work of other types of people and whether or not they should be covered under this legislation with respect to the presumption, but I'm just talking about corrections officers. When the Minister of Human Services got up, he very quickly moved into a discussion of other occupations who he didn't believe were appropriately included under this bill. He didn't really focus his explanation on why it is that corrections officers are excluded from coverage under this bill.

If for a moment you accept the government's explanation that what we're really doing here is that we want to narrow it really, really carefully to those who do first responses, who are first responders, who are trained to be first responders, who are compelled, through both the culture as well as the workplace direction as well as what they're trained to do, to put themselves at risk, then there is no difference between the different types of first responders that the government has included in this bill and the corrections officers. As other people have also argued, I would suggest that it is actually possible to argue that they are faced with those traumatic situations in some cases even more frequently than some of the other first responders who were identified by members of the government through this bill. So I truly want an explanation from this government.

Now, last night the associate minister went on a long, grand soliloquy about how what this really is about is thanking our first responders and that if we question this, well, then we're questioning our thanking of the first responders. Really, that's what he said over and over and over again. Beyond that he was unable to provide any foundational fact-based, research-based, policy analysis-based explanation for why we were excluding corrections officers. He wasn't able to point to the difference in the work, the difference in the legal status between them, the difference in their obligations, the difference in frequency of traumatic events, the difference in what the employer expects of them in their workplace. He wasn't able to point to any of those kinds of issues.

Now, the minister in charge of Human Services overall suggested: well, what we're doing is that we're trying to compensate those fairly through the presumption who have this obligation to show up at traumatizing situations and accident sites

as a regular part of their job. Fair enough. Now, even that definition, which is more narrow, could be quite easily applied to a rather long list of people, but let's just say that we're just talking about those people who are in uniforms, who are authorized to be armed, who are expected to physically intervene in emergency situations and are expected to provide medical care on an emergent basis, no matter the extent and the degree of the trauma that they are faced with when they get to that emergency situation. If you're doing it even in that very, very narrow way, again, nobody on the other side has been able to provide an explanation for why it is that corrections officers are not included. Corrections officers have to do that.

Now, the Minister of Human Services said: well, you know, I think it's possible that in the prison system we can presume things are under control, so it's not quite as volatile, and it's not quite as risky as it is when you're a police officer showing up in the middle of a robbery or you're showing up at a traffic accident. I will say that it is not as a result of having watched every episode of *Oz* that I'm saying this. I am saying this instead because I, as I've said before, had the privilege of representing corrections officers for three or four years when I first became a lawyer.

3:40

Indeed, I was one of the people that ran one of the first hearings in front of the Occupational Health and Safety Council and, if I recall correctly, it was a two-day hearing where we called about nine or 10 witnesses, corrections officers each one of them, before the Occupational Health and Safety Council, where each of them described their work, went through documents which showed near miss reports, accident reports, professional responsibility reports, all those kinds of things, and also in great detail talked about what it meant when best practices were at that time periodically overlooked by management.

At that time best practices were to avoid double-bunking. Now, of course, as many people who follow the discussion in corrections know, we've long since moved past double-bunking. We're ratcheted up to triple-bunking now, in particular in the remand centre here in Edmonton. The research is clear; the objective fact-collection processes are clear. When you do that, the level of violence and level of traumatic and uncontrollable and violent incidents goes up.

So when the minister says, "Oh, I think there's really a fair amount of control there, and they're all really fairly safe," I would urge him to look at the record of the Occupational Health and Safety Council, which actually wrote a decision on this back in the early '90s. I would urge him to look at any or all of the occupational health and safety research out there about the state of our prisons and the frequency of the traumatic and violent events that occur in those settings because the fact of the matter is that it is intense, people. It is really intense.

These people go to work every day, and they, just like the other first responders who are covered under this legislation, agree to put themselves at risk when they walk through that door every morning. When they put on their weapon and they put on their uniform and they walk into that not-so-very-controlled setting, where a whole bunch of people who are the top 10, the most popular of the criminals that the other first responders had to sift through, who are all nicely collected and concentrated in this building, which is overfilled, with inadequate safety prevention initiatives in place – because, as we know, as has been commented on by I believe it was a Court of Appeal judge, but maybe it was a Queen's Bench judge here in Alberta within the last two or three years, our remand centre is a travesty. We have some serious problems in terms of how we're able to manage and maintain the

safety of not only the corrections officers but, quite frankly, the inmates in that setting.

Again, anyone who has spent a little bit of time with the Solicitor General or, in this case, the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, who at one point was the Solicitor General, would know that that is the environment that has developed in our prisons and remand centres across the province. To suggest, then, that these folks are not first responders in every way, shape, or form as the other first responders who have been identified is illogical, Mr. Chair. It is absolutely illogical, and there is no rationale for it. It is frustrating for me that we cannot get an explanation from this government because it would be good governance to include these people.

Now, previously the minister also said, "Well, everybody is eligible for PTSD coverage," but let's just be entirely clear here. The literature is unequivocal on this that the vast number of people do not apply for PTSD coverage. The same cultural inhibitions that work within the ranks of firefighters and police officers and EMT professionals also exist and function within the ranks of corrections officers. Often they just simply don't apply, or if they do apply, what they do is go to long-term disability because long-term disability is not as intrusive and as painful as workers' compensation is. But when you say that they get compensated, does the minister really believe that only 22 Albertans in the last two years have developed posttraumatic stress disorder in this province? Do you really believe, based on all the research, that that is the actual number of people with posttraumatic stress disorder arising from traumatic events in their workplace? That's a ridiculously naive assumption.

The fact of the matter is that that is simply not the case. The case is that most don't apply, and the number that do apply go through such hell that they actually withdraw their applications before they're even considered, or they withdraw them partway through the process, or they're outright rejected. The fact of the matter is that although in theory PTSD is covered in this province, the obstacle course that claimants have to go through, the degree to which they have to subject their life, their history, their family, their medical records, their marriage counselling sessions – I mean, all of these things are things that the WCB demands and succeeds in getting from someone who claims for PTSD.

If you as a corrections officer witness and are part of a violent exchange that results, let's say, in someone being brutally stabbed and beaten and you yourself are almost brutally stabbed and beaten in that and you file a claim for PTSD, you can bet that if you've been to see a counsellor for marriage counselling, the WCB will absolutely demand to have access to those records, and they will demand the opportunity to speak to your wife or, God forbid, your ex-wife to find out whether there is another way in which your PTSD can be explained. Because the onus is on you to show that it was that brutal stabbing that caused the PTSD, all they have to show is: well, you know, five years ago he was pretty wacky with his wife, and she's a totally objective witness in this case. You know what? We've created doubt. They haven't made their case; they don't get compensation for PTSD.

So it is really quite misleading for the minister to say that all Albertans are eligible for or entitled to coverage for PTSD in this province because the way the WCB administers that right now is extremely onerous, extremely invasive. In many cases it actually reinjures them, and I've seen doctors' reports that have actually supported this notion. The process of WCB adjudication is in and of itself an injury. I've actually seen the WCB, when on the most rare of occasions someone is able to actually afford a lawyer, be compelled to compensate people for the injury that they created as

a result of their adjudication process, particularly as it relates to mental health issues.

We go back to the fact that the presumption, then, is a progressive and wonderful move forward, and it is something that the government should be congratulated on. But I continue to stand here waiting for someone over there to take the time to provide a rational, thoughtful, well-researched, justifiable explanation why these hard-working first responders who work in our corrections system are being excluded from coverage by this legislation. It makes no sense, Mr. Chairman. It smacks of the worst of political opportunism on the part of this government. If they're not prepared to give us the research for why correctional officers are excluded, then they should do the right thing and vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the hon. member already pointed out the misstatement. Earlier the member from across the aisle mentioned something about social workers, and that's not in this amendment. What this amendment is dealing with is correctional officers and the definition of correctional officers.

I think there might be a misunderstanding of what a correctional officer does and the danger correctional officers put themselves in on a daily basis. I do have a solution. I think someone needs to go over and get themselves involved in a jail and see what these people actually go through. I just pulled up some quick statistics on this issue. Fifty-four correctional officers have died in the line of duty in Canada as compared to 133 police officers. These are first responders.

3:50

One of the things that is paramount about posttraumatic stress disorder is the stress level, and I want you to think about this. Put yourself in the prison. Put yourself behind the bars, behind those locked gates. The minute you walk to work, that stress level picks up, and the threat is constant. When I drove a cruiser, I only felt that threat when the call for help came and I was brought into a dangerous situation. But for correctional officers that threat is paramount. Every minute, every hour, every second of their daily duty they are in harm's way.

To say that we're sort of picking and choosing: I would disagree with that member's comment. We're not picking and choosing. What we're identifying is an aspect of this bill where we've left out one segment of society that puts their life on the line every day and lives with that stress every day. I have to tell you that some of these young women, some of these young men who go there are face to face with the element of our society that we want locked up. We want them locked up for our own protection. We need them locked up. That's really important. Those are the ones that we rely on to make sure that these people that are locked up stay locked up and don't harm other people in that facility.

I would actually say that to not approve this motion is sort of callous in the sense of looking at these correctional officers as if they do not matter, when the fact is that they matter sometimes, I think, the most.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. Let me speak as a current paramedic that still works the car when I find the time available. To be clear, correctional officers do put it on the line every day. It is a stressful job. There's no doubt that there are people that have seen things in there that suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome. There's no doubt in my mind.

However, the intent of this bill was to talk about the people, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary, that do the hundreds of thousands of calls every year, hundreds of thousands. Now, responding to whether it's correctional facilities in Calgary or Edmonton, they are not as frequent, and let me tell you that it's we who respond with tactical teams, the tactical paramedics, the tactical SWAT teams, when things really hit the fan.

Again, I don't want to detract from what correctional officers do. They're important. Let me say that again. They're important. But in passing this bill, the intent was to thank the people that every day, whether it's in a volunteer capacity in a rural setting, in a professional setting in the cities and in some of the bedroom committees – it's important for us to recognize this.

I'll speak to this member who has proposed this change. We've had some interactions over the years. In fact, any time that we get into this debate, we like to take the opportunity to thank these people because we're trying to include all of these people. Here's a good example. For the parent who has a child fall out the window, technically they are the very first responder, and more often than not they suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome. That takes them away from their families and their jobs. We have to have the ability to draw the line for the people who choose this as a profession, not only from a humanitarian perspective but from a perspective of making it sustainable, making sure that the job is attractive, because we know that they go to work and do these hundreds of thousands of calls every day.

Let me go back to the tactical police and paramedics that respond to the Edmonton Max or other various correctional facilities here in the province. They don't have the ability to lock it down, lock down the entire province and lock down the entire city like a correctional facility would do for a number of days until it calms down. What they do is take off their tactical uniform, put their regular uniform back on, and get back out on the street to save the choking children, to save the grandparents and the parents that are having heart attacks.

I'm not in favour of this motion. I am in favour of correctional officers and the work that they do. They're important. If the evidence and the traumatic incidents increase, I would be supportive of that motion later being introduced. But at this point the way that this bill stands, I think it's important that we get this ball rolling, protect those who per capita – like, thousands of calls every day. I think that in the city of Calgary for paramedics, EMS, alone there are well over a hundred thousand calls, and that's increasing on a percentage of 7 to 9 per cent per year. In fact, this past year – and I've said it before – 30 per cent call volume. Well, that ties along with community policing and everything else and the sheriffs just as population grows. Now, we all hear when the Edmonton Max and all these other facilities fly off the handle. I think it's important to recognize the high volume right now where we know the evidence is, where we know we can assume that it's presumptive.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments of the hon. member from the other side, and I appreciate the first-

hand experience that he brings to the table. I'm speaking in favour of this amendment on a little different note only because the Bowden Institution is located in my riding and I have many, many friends who are correctional officers and who deal with this type of employment every single day.

One of the things that they constantly talk about is the average day. The average day means that when they leave the house, they have to make sure that every window and every door is locked, they have to make sure their children are walked safely to school, and they have to make sure that they have no listed phone numbers and that their addresses are not known. Then they head off to work to deal with some of the worst people that we don't really want to deal with. That's the start of their day.

Now, inside the prison system – luckily, I've visited but never had an overnight stay, thankfully – they have to deal with a multitude of events. Sometimes it's rape, sometimes it's stabbing, sometimes it's attempted murder, sometimes it's murder, sometimes it's just the day-to-day denigration of these types of individuals, and they're constantly in that negative situation.

One of the things that they constantly tell me is that in their jobs, the requirements of their jobs, they never really get the opportunity to see rehabilitation. Then when you're dealing with that day to day, that provides a stress level. Then they have an event, and there's a psychological stigma that is attached to corrections officers, as there is attached to many people in this field, that doesn't allow them to step forward and say: "This was the event that caused my trauma. Please, I need some help." When they're not able to do that, what ends up happening is that they go back to their families and they self-medicate either through alcohol or drugs or physical violence.

The reality of this legislation is less about what those people are bringing to the table day to day but more about the ability for them to seek medical help without having to be the one that says: it was this event that triggered my event. I think it's important if we want to keep families together and if we want to ensure that we have productive people in these types of jobs that they get the help that they need as soon as possible.

Clearly, we know from WCB stats in all occupations that the sooner the person receives medical attention, the sooner the person receives psychological attention, and the sooner the person is able to go back to their employment, the better off that employee is. The ability to have the presumptive nature put into this legislation for correctional officers allows for a better temperament of people that are dealing with these types of situations.

Another dilemma that we have here is whether or not to cover sheriffs. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has put forward sheriffs as well.

4:00

I personally have a family member who is a sheriff. On a pretty regular basis his daily employment is not that much different than a police officer's or a correctional officer's, those sorts of things. He goes out every day putting his life on the line, and every day he doesn't know what he's going to run into, and he doesn't know what kind of serious incident is going to affect him.

The one thing that keeps coming up is that it's not necessarily the job that they do; it's that it's usually a multitude or a series of events that creates posttraumatic stress disorder. When those series of events happen, then how do you know which event triggered your posttraumatic stress disorder?

Each one of these individual workers is doing their best for Albertans. They're keeping us safe, and they need to be acknowledged for that. They worry about their families. They

worry about when the offender leaves the facility. They worry about whether that offender is going to hurt anyone in their family. They worry about whether that offender is going to come after them. Did they have some sort of altercation within the system that caused this offender to be violent? These types of issues and posttraumatic stress disorder directly affect their marriages. You know, the multitude of marriage breakdowns, which ultimately affect their families and ultimately effect negative consequences for their children, is something that can't be ignored.

In reality, if we allowed these correctional officers to be included into this legislation, those officers could seek help immediately, resolve those issues, and get back to work sooner. They could also become much more productive members of their families and allow their families to grow with them and grow in an occupation that is desperately needed in this province.

I can appreciate the comments: "Where do we want to go from here? How much of a nanny state do we want to have?" I can appreciate those comments because I've sat back and, in my decision to support this bill, have had that conversation. I reached out to the stakeholders in my community and had conversations with them. Over and over and over again the message that I heard was: "The clientele that we're dealing with, the type of events that we're dealing with, and the situation in which we deal with those definitely lead us to a higher amount of posttraumatic stress disorder." So I think that going forward the presumption is the right thing to do.

I strongly believe that this bill is a good bill, and I would support this bill wholeheartedly, but I would ask: take a step back, take a look at correctional officers in your communities, have a discussion with them about what they do on a day-to-day basis, and bring that back. I strongly encourage you to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other comments on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Chairman. I rise here today also in support of this amendment to Bill 1. This is my first attempt at this, so I'll try to get through it. I think it's a good amendment, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. To include these individuals in this, I think, is very important. These people do some very dangerous work. I also question the comments made by the Minister of Human Services, not because I don't respect what he has to say and his wealth of knowledge, but I think that the comment that he made I'm going to just maybe counter a bit.

Everyday exposure does not mean PTSD will occur. There's the ability for individuals who have that makeup to actually attend to their job to a high level, and they're able to function. They can do this. They can do this over and over and over, but sometimes they're going to hit an event that just pushes them over the edge. It's something that they didn't anticipate when they walked in that morning, and it just takes one event. I think that's the important part here. It could happen once, and that might not show up right away. I just wanted to counter that statement of: over and over and over. It only takes once. I think that's important.

I think the other thing, too, is that in this regard we're asking certain people to do these jobs that most of us would not want to do, don't aspire to do, never dream of wanting to do. I think that in that situation, when these individuals do get put into a position where they are mentally stressed for whatever reason, it's incumbent upon us to be there for them if they ever do require some kind of treatment for a mental issue, if it is PTSD and determined to be so.

I think one of the reasons that we're actually talking about making this amendment, adding people to this list – this is my personal opinion – is because of the multiple designations we have created in the peacekeeping business, I guess, so to speak. We have police officers. We have sheriffs. We have peace officers. We have an abundant, you know, number of different designations, and I think it was done to basically reduce the responsibility and the cost that each one of these levels of service, that each one of these individual jobs provides. But it doesn't mean that any one of these people may not be called upon to attend an accident or an event that could create some mental anguish or mental stress. In saying that, I think we do owe these people the obligation that should they ever be faced with this, we won't turn our backs on them because they didn't turn their backs on us. Their job/role description may not officially designate them to deal with this on a daily basis, but they are there to do that work for us.

As I wrap this up, I do support, generally, Bill 1. I think there are some amendments that could be brought forward and discussed, and hopefully we can talk about what gets added and what doesn't, but I do generally speak in favour of amendment A1.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's with great pleasure that I get to rise and actually speak on the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012, Bill 1, and the amendments that have been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I feel especially privileged to be able to stand up and speak in support of this amendment as the former Solicitor General for the province of Alberta. Knowing full well as the former Solicitor General of the province of Alberta that the correctional facilities were under provincial jurisdiction, I can tell you that after the meetings that I went to on FPTs and some of the tours that I took into some of the federal correctional facilities, I am extremely pleased to be able to stand up and support the members of the Correctional Service of Canada under the Corrections Act and make sure that they're incorporated and included under Bill 1. It makes perfect sense to me that under the work and duress that these corrections officers do on a daily basis in correctional facilities, they should come under this act.

I also noticed that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has talked about the Peace Officer Act and the sheriffs. I was actually with the government when we brought forward the sheriffs into this province, and I've gotten to know the sheriffs throughout this province over the last several years. There's no question that they should also be incorporated in Bill 1, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act.

Mr. Chair, I wanted to stand up. I've had calls from some corrections officers, and I told them that I would be speaking in support of this particular legislation. I will want that on the record, and I'm on the record now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's important that we remember here that what we're not doing is that we're not saying that just because you work as a correctional officer, you're going to have posttraumatic stress disorder. I would like to share with this House the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder:

one, the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others, and two, the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

4:10

For the condition to continue and be diagnosed, they now have to exhibit at least three of these next criteria: intrusive recollections; distressing nightmares; acting, feeling as though the event were reoccurring or having flashbacks; psychological distress when exposed to traumatic reminders; physiological reactivity when exposed to traumatic reminders.

Next segment, two of the following avoidant/numbing symptoms: avoidance of thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the stressor; avoidance of activities, places, or people associated with the stressor; inability to recall important aspects of the traumatic event; diminished interest in significant activities; detachment from others; restricted range of affect; sense of foreshortened future.

Next set: sleep problems, irritability, concentration problems, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response.

The reality is that all we're suggesting here is that when people are diagnosed by a medical doctor, a psychologist looks an individual in the eye, diagnoses them on these conditions, not an arbitrary WCB employee saying: yes, you look like you must have posttraumatic stress. The bill clearly states that this is the model we're using here. I ask you: is it not reasonable to assume that if a correctional officer is diagnosed with this, they actually got that while doing their job? That's what this amendment says, period.

This is not about thanking first responders for the great job they do and dismissing others. That's not what this is about. This amendment is simply stating that if a correctional officer has been psychologically diagnosed with these conditions, it is then reasonable to assume it's work related, and they have presumptive coverage. That is why this should be a supported amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other speakers to this amendment?

If not, I would call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:12 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Fox	Smith
Anglin	Hale	Stier
Bikman	Notley	Strankman
Bilous	Pedersen	Swann
Blakeman	Rowe	Towle
Eggen	Saskiw	Wilson
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Allen	Goudreau	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Griffiths	Olesen
Bhullar	Hancock	Olson
Brown	Horner	Pastoor
Campbell	Hughes	Quadri
Casey	Jansen	Quest
Cusanelli	Jeneroux	Sarich

Dallas	Johnson, L.	Scott
DeLong	Khan	Starke
Drysdale	Kubinec	VanderBurg
Fenske	Luan	Webber
Fraser	McAllister	Xiao
Fritz	McDonald	Young
Totals:	For – 19	Against – 39

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We will continue with the discussion on the original bill. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am becoming increasingly less pleased to rise to speak to this bill. Nonetheless, I will still do so to talk about some of the other concerns that we have with respect to the bill as it is currently drafted. Again, as I've said before, it is always important to start by talking about the value of this piece of legislation generally and the dire need for there to be some type of presumptive law when we're dealing with compensation for mental health issues in the workplace and, in particular, when we're dealing with compensation for posttraumatic stress disorder.

I would like, Mr. Chairman, to propose another amendment to this piece of legislation. Obviously, based on the result of the last vote, it does seem unlikely that the government is going to be terribly interested in accepting it. Nonetheless, I believe it is worthwhile.

Ms Blakeman: You should still do the right thing.

Ms Notley: Thank you. The Member for Edmonton-Centre says that it's the right thing either way.

I think it would be worthwhile to put this issue on the agenda so we can have a more clear conversation about this particular issue, which is unfortunately not well addressed through the terms of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I have copies of the amendment with me for distribution. I think it's the right one this time, so I won't confuse people. I will sit down for a moment while it's being distributed and then talk about the substance of the amendment that I'm proposing.

Thank you.

The Chair: This amendment we will be referring to as A2. Hon. member, to the amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be able to speak about the amendment that I am now putting forward. I apologize for any confusion that my comments last evening might have created for people when I started to read out the amendment that actually was talking about corrections officers and then started reading this particular draft because I had two different files. So I do apologize for this.

Basically, what this proposed amendment is attempting to do is to add health service workers and social workers to Bill 1 so that they, too, would enjoy the benefit of the presumptive coverage offered through Bill 1. The way in which that would be done would be by amending section 2 in the proposed section 24.2 in subsection (1) by renumbering clause (a) as clause (a.1) and by adding the following before clause (a.1):

(a) "emergency health care services provider" means an individual who is engaged in providing emergency medical treatment in an emergency department or trauma unit;

and by adding the following after clause (g):

(h) "social worker" means an individual who is registered as a member of the Alberta College of Social Workers.

Then in subsection (2) striking out "or police officer" wherever it occurs and substituting "police officer, emergency health care services provider or social worker."

4:30

As is obvious from what the amendment says, I am proposing to add these two categories of extremely valuable and important and critical contributors to our community to the list of people who would enjoy the benefit of the presumption under the amended Workers' Compensation Act through Bill 1.

Just in terms of definitions when we talk about social workers, it's important to understand, and we've been advised by the College of Social Workers, that those who are registered under the College of Social Workers can include child care workers. It's a broader range than the name would normally imply, and it includes those who are engaged in front-line social service counselling and work, generally speaking. Some of the reasons for this have already been outlined. Social workers confront traumatic situations on a routine basis, and they often respond to difficult domestic situations and cases of public emergency, actually.

I've been contacted by the Alberta College of Social Workers, and they indicate that they truly cannot understand why the government would overlook the services provided by their members. Moreover, they have approached the government but have been unable to get any response. Indeed, in July the college sent letters outlining their concerns to three members of this House: the Premier, the Minister of Human Services, and the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. These letters requested that social workers be listed as first responders in this act. It was a simple and logical request and one that the government could easily have accepted or, dare I say it, at least considered. In the three months since these three letters were delivered, the college has not even received the courtesy of a response from the Premier, the minister, or the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

I just want to review again why it is that I think it's so important to be able to include these two groups of people in the legislation that we're talking about here today. I apologize if I've said this before, but I think it really, really underlies what we're dealing with here. I want to talk about an event that occurred in B.C. a decade and a half ago, so as to not in any way aggrandize or sensationalize issues which are in the current discussion or public discussion now.

In B.C. a social worker was contacted by a neighbour, I suspect, of a family where the neighbour understood that the children in the family were known to the ministry, as it were. They also indicated that there was some concern that there may have been criminal activity going on in the apartment that the neighbour was calling the social worker about. The social worker, knowing that there might be some issue of criminal engagement or criminal activity in the apartment, contacted a police officer, and the two of them went to this apartment. When they came into the apartment, they were met with a horrifying scene, a scene that I'm not going to spend a lot of time discussing but suffice to say that there was a child who was roughly 18 months old who was dead and who had been dead for a period of time and who had clearly died under absolutely abhorrent and tragic and upsetting circumstances.

Then, let's move forward six months. Here's what would happen if this happened in Alberta today. Regardless of whether that was the only traumatic incident that the police officer had observed or whether they had observed a number of traumatic incidents or whether the police officer was a brand new recruit and

had actually stayed in the car doing paperwork and never actually made it to the scene, it doesn't matter. If six months from now that police officer started experiencing symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, they could apply for compensation for that posttraumatic stress disorder and would automatically be compensated. Now, that's fine. I understand the rationale for why the government wants to do that. That's good because in so many cases that person wouldn't be compensated.

What would happen to that social worker, though, is that she would apply for posttraumatic stress disorder, and the Workers' Compensation Board would first insist that she needed to be examined by their doctors and their psychologists, who, just to be clear, often are on contract with the Workers' Compensation Board because they happen to have a particular approach to how they deal with posttraumatic stress disorder.

Ms Blakeman: Do you mean friends or in the family?

Ms Notley: They happen to be people who are in the family, the Member for Edmonton-Centre outlines, that lovely "in the family" phrase.

Those psychologists, notwithstanding that the social worker already has a diagnosis from a reputable physician, will demand and exercise their extremely intrusive rights under the Workers' Compensation Act as it currently exists to subject that social worker to a battery of interviews, assessments, testing, all that kind of stuff. In addition, that social worker may well be told that she needs to talk about any or all mental health care, treatment, counselling, anything that's ever happened in her life.

And if in the course of talking to that board-hired psychologist, she mentions, "Oh, yes, you know, when I was five we had a traumatic incident in my family," well, then the WCB has absolute and complete ability to go back to when she was five and to uncover all the records of that time. All they have to do is show that there was another traumatic incident in this person's life, and because the onus of proof is on that social worker, the WCB has probably met the legal test to argue that the PTSD is not related to the traumatic incident that the social worker experienced when she walked into that apartment and found the deceased baby.

So two very different outcomes. Just to be clear, with the social worker what will happen is that, you know, it'll take a year or two years, and she will have potentially had the WCB film her, they will potentially have hired a private investigator to follow her around, they may well have asked for any files, as I've said before, associated with marriage counselling or any counselling of any type in her life. Her world is an open book. All the WCB has to do is find some other reason why she might have developed this diagnosis, and then they don't have to cover her. So they will do that, and I say that with absolute certainty, Mr. Chairman, because I've represented far too many people where exactly that has happened.

So two people: both at the same incident, both affected similarly by the same incident, both there as a result of the requirements of their work. One gets covered; the other has her life turned inside out and upside down and is, in fact, subsequently reinjured by that process, very possibly, and in any event does not get compensation.

Now, I've sort of touched on this a little bit in the past as well in previous comments. What will likely happen is that she will claim for long-term disability benefits if she is lucky enough to have them, and she may get those benefits because to get long-term disability, all you have to do is show that you have a disability. You don't have to show that it's causally related to your employment. So she will get those benefits for a period of time.

Now, in getting those benefits, you need to understand, she has copaid for them whereas with Workers' Compensation in theory it's the employer that has paid for those benefits. We're now making certain employees, if they should be so lucky to make it through that obstacle course to actually get benefits – these are benefits that they are now copaying for. The other thing that will happen, of course, is that, you know, those types of benefits often don't last as long.

4:40

The other issue that arises, of course, is that that's only where that social worker actually is eligible for long-term disability benefits. The more we contract out these services, the more we ask nonprofits in the community to provide our social services and to provide that work for us, the less likely these workers have the benefit of that well-paid union job with all these extra benefits. The odds are good that they don't actually have access to long-term disability. So then that social worker, after she's gone through a two-year process of having her life turned inside out by the Workers' Compensation Board so that they can deny her PTSD, will end up on welfare because, God knows, she won't be entitled to AISH. That's a whole other conversation that we could go on about here for a very long time.

So two very different outcomes for people that have been exposed to exactly the same situation.

We know that social workers come up against this kind of traumatic stuff regularly in the course of their employment. That's what the minister suggested: well, are you exposed to traumatic things in the regular course of your employment? I've talked to social workers at great length about how it is in their world, you know, child protection workers who work diligently with a certain child who they know has been subjected to horrendous, horrendous abuse. They try hard to provide support to that child, and oftentimes they're compelled to put the child back into a situation that they know is dangerous. That, frankly, is traumatizing.

For anyone to not get that that is a traumatizing event, they are making some very significant value judgments about how people process traumatic events. Frankly, I think it starts to smack quite significantly of sexism and sort of a respect for one person's pain and a dismissal of another person's type of pain.

The other group of people that this amendment seeks to include, of course, is health service workers. Now we're getting back to the trauma of the carnage on the highway that the minister keeps talking about. The associate minister said that this is really about compensating and thanking those people who respond to these horrible, traumatic accidents on the highway. Then, of course, another member from his caucus got up and said: well, no, it's really about the number of emergent calls that they get in a day. Then another member got up and said: well, really, it's about whether they deal with these things in the regular course of their work. Heaven forbid that a lawyer ever gets a hold of this.

Ms Blakeman: Did they read the bill?

Ms Notley: They don't appear to have read the bill or have a full understanding of workers' compensation law.

That being said, if we just go back to the highway dynamic, one wonders. You know, the carnage that one sees on a highway: no question that it is shocking and traumatizing. I know, for instance, that people who work with Alberta Transportation periodically – I don't know if I'd say regularly but, certainly, with more frequency than the general population – are exposed to those kinds of things. I'm not entirely sure why the guy who's driving the ambulance

gets the presumptive coverage for seeing the trauma that they saw, but the person who's at the door of the emergency room and taking that person inside and trying to deal with the outcome of that carnage in a life-and-death kind of scenario for a much more extended period of time doesn't get to enjoy the benefit of that presumptive coverage.

We know that our emergency rooms are places where trauma exists all the time. Traumatic events occur all the time, and people's lives are permanently changed all the time. People watch their mothers and their fathers and their children pass away all the time. They're counselling them, and they're trying to save their lives. In some cases they do, and in some cases they don't. The most horrifying of injuries: these people deal with them. It's not as if the traumatic carnage that we see on the highway is just wrapped up in a bow and taken away somewhere so that no one else sees it. It comes into our emergency rooms. So I don't understand why, when it gets into emergency rooms, suddenly those people, who, by the way, by virtue of their professional body and their professional designation are not given the choice to walk away from what they see – whether you're talking about a doctor or a nurse or any one of a number of other professionals, they are compelled by their professional body to provide the best care that they can and to put themselves second in the course of providing that care. The judgment of what's second, how you put someone second or not, is a bit complex if you get into the decisions at great length.

I hate to say it, but I did spend a bit of time in my career representing nurses in front of their professional bodies, so I'm fully aware of how the professional body insists that when they get up in the morning, they put on their little Wonder Woman outfit and put on their little Wonder Woman cape. They forget that they haven't slept. They forget that they're on their sixth consecutive overtime shift. They forget that they're working short. They forget that many supports that are supposed to be in place for them from their employer – this government, actually, ultimately – are not there, and they do whatever they can to provide the best treatment and care possible to the victims with whom they deal. That's their job, and if they don't do that, their professional body tells them it's their fault.

I've been at those hearings. I know that's what it's like for many, many people who work in the health care field. That's why we regularly get up here and talk about how much we love nurses and how we don't have enough nurses and about: wouldn't it be great if we had more nurses? Hopefully, we'll manage to go a year or two without this government accidentally firing a thousand nurses and losing a whole graduating class for a year. Anyway, that's a whole different issue.

The point is that these people put themselves on the line. In that traffic accident scenario, if you follow it through, I'm not quite sure why one group is being compensated and the other group is not. It's a little concerning because one group does tend to be primarily male, and the group that's not being compensated, once again, tends to be primarily female.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities and then the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise again and just provide some additional thoughts on Bill 1 at this time on the amendment before us. I don't want to make any comment about social workers or anybody else because I do not want for a second for anybody to think – it would be wrong – that

I don't value the excellent work they do. That is really not the point here.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona provides an anecdote of somebody. You know, anecdotal evidence abounds, but it rarely usefully guides us. I say through you, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that I myself would probably qualify for PTSD and certainly some of the symptoms that the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw read out just a while ago in his explanation of how PTSD diagnosis works. I caught part of it on the air. I didn't catch what he said about it, but I want to stress that all workers, whether they would have presumptive PTSD or not, would first of all have to be diagnosed, and it's not an easy test.

I can tell you that probably 25 years ago this month, in a work-related incident, I had to recover the body of a co-worker, actually somebody that reported to me, who was killed by a bear. To this day I think I still suffer from some of the incidents that the hon. member outlined. I still wake up with cold sweats, and there's an image burned in my mind that I'm sure I will never get rid of. That's not the point. That's probably more stressful than most people would have to put up with.

I was in the bush that night by myself till 3 o'clock in the morning in the pitch black with a flashlight and a compass looking for him. I think I walked probably within 40 metres of his location, but it was pitch black, and I didn't find him. The next morning I went in and found him, and I was, as it turned out later, probably within about 40 metres of the bear den. I have no idea if the bear was there or not at the time. That afternoon, when a recovery team went in, the bear was there and attacked them. You know, it was a stressful situation.

4:50

A lot of people encounter unbelievable stress in their life. I don't rise to claim victimhood or anything, but I do rise to point out that just because your job is stressful, it doesn't mean that you should have presumptive PTSD. Whether or not I meet any medical test, I wouldn't for a second think that I should have presumptive PTSD even if I'm diagnosed with it. In my life I've had a lot of other stressful things that are absolutely not work related, as everybody does. We've seen car accidents. We've seen house fires. We've had families or friends that have lost children and other horrific, horrific incidents in our lives that have nothing to do with work. It's not how stressful your job is.

I do not want to speak specifically to the careers mentioned in the proposed amendment, Mr. Chairman, and I do not in any way denigrate the good and, I'm sure, very stressful work, for example, that social workers do, but I will say this. The hon. member alluded to the fact that the College of Social Workers attempted to contact the government and got no response. I'll stand here right now and tell you that nobody who attempted to contact me got no response. I did talk to the president of the AUPE and – the word escapes me – an entourage. He had some fellows with him, other executives from the AUPE. I did, as I indicated last night, talk to a representative of the union of federal corrections workers from the prairie provinces. Nobody from the College of Social Workers contacted me. Had they done so, I would have talked to them or met with them at their convenience. I just wanted to make that clear.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to provide those comments.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this occasion to speak in favour of the amendments that my caucus is putting

forward, which amend the list of occupations for which the presumptive principle is extended for PTSD compensation. I'm a strong advocate that emergency health workers and social workers need to be on this list as two groups of people that are Alberta's first responders.

You know, I'd like to first and foremost maybe clarify or detail the responsibilities that these folks carry out on a day-to-day basis. I can appreciate what the hon. member on the other side has said as far as people dealing with different stressful situations day to day. However, these are folks that are encountering traumatic situations because of their occupation, and the different experiences that many of them have, I think, as all in the Assembly probably know, can have a lifetime effect on people.

The fact that those two groups aren't included actually surprises me because I've spoken to emergency health service professionals and social workers not only about what they see but what they live through on a day-to-day basis, from disclosures that people give to them to what they have to carry around about individuals. They try to do their jobs to the best of their ability, sometimes, I'm sure, experiencing roadblocks that are a cause of frustration but, beyond that, that have that long-term effect on their health and well-being.

Again, social workers confront traumatic situations on a routine basis. They respond to difficult domestic situations, cases of public emergencies. As my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has so eloquently pointed out, the Alberta College of Social Workers cannot understand why the government would overlook the services that their members provide and how they are somehow cut off this list. You know, I share their frustration that they have approached the government via three letters to the Minister of Human Services, the Premier, and the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. The fact that the letters weren't shared, then, on the government side with the appropriate people is a letdown. These letters just talked about how their request was one that is pretty logical as far as what they're dealing with on a day-to-day basis and their case for why they should be included.

Again, social workers are first responders. In domestic disputes they arrive on scene with police officers, so they're seeing and experiencing the same thing or similar things that the officers are experiencing when they arrive on scene. The fact that one group fits under this umbrella and the group of social workers doesn't just seem – I mean, it's not just unfair. This is people's livelihoods. There are folks, I'm sure, where it's affected all areas of their lives, their families' lives, others as well.

Where this legislation falls down could also be a deterrent for those possibly looking at going into these different fields. There is a lot of different weight that's placed on these groups of people as far as what they experience and what they go through. I think the fact that they're not included in this legislation sends a message to them that, you know, they don't qualify, that their job is somehow either less important, or that they somehow have maybe some kind of harder skin or should be able to endure different traumatic situations, situations that for some people are acknowledged to be traumatic and that therefore they may need extension of services while others do not. The fact that those two groups are left off this list is a clear message, in my opinion, that they're not being listened to, that they're not being valued for the work they do, nor is their job or occupation understood by the government.

As well, the amendment, like I said, seeks to include emergency health service workers to ensure that nurses and other professionals who staff our trauma units and emergency departments and who are engaged in providing emergency medical services on a day-to-day basis are afforded the same rights regarding the presumptive principles as other first responders. For myself, we're

talking about their livelihood, their right as a human being, and what they're doing and putting forward in the name of service. It not only needs to be acknowledged, but they deserve to have this coverage.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments pretty short on this one. I certainly appreciate the intent of what our members in the NDP caucus are presenting. I can relate to how the members across the floor were arguing during the last amendment. You know, we do need to essentially draw the line somewhere.

I would like to read from *Clinical Psychology Review* a definition of a first responder. This was a document I tabled last week after my speech on second reading to this. The article is called *Treating Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in First Responders: A Systematic Review*.

In the context of this article, we use the term first responders to refer to a heterogeneous grouping of both paid professionals and volunteers who provide critical services in emergencies; for many their main occupational task is first response – e.g. fire fighters. Typical first responders have specialized training, sometimes with explicit certification, which both prepare them and entitle them to take action to safeguard the health and safety of those victimized. This action usually occurs on an individual basis and for the public at large, most often in emergencies.

Just based on that definition, I think that the way the bill is now worded, with presumptive care for EMT, firefighters, police, and peace officers, is sufficient. We've already discussed the item of correctional officers. That amendment has been defeated, and it is my opinion that that is where the presumptive care should end in Bill 1.

Thank you.

5:00

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.
I'll recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to stand at this time and speak to this amendment. I realize the intent, and I think the issue is one of presumptiveness, not that social workers aren't covered because, of course, they are under WCB.

I happen to have a daughter, Molly, who is a social worker who happens to practice in Boston and has been exposed to a number of things that I might consider traumatic but that she, in her training, considers part of the job and that have prepared her for the kinds of things that she has the potential to experience. One of the experiences that she had happens to have been that one of her clients committed suicide while in her care. Obviously, she wasn't present at the time, but that had an effect on her. She has dealt with it through counselling with others as well as because of the professional training that she has and, quite frankly, also because of her faith. That's not suggesting that everybody will deal with such traumatic events in the same way. She's not in any way, shape, or form, at least in her practice, what could be considered a first responder.

I just don't feel that the issue of presumptiveness applies to this category of worker within our society. Nonetheless, they do important work, and I'd be remiss if I didn't express appreciation for the help that I've received from people in this category myself and with our family.

I'm not in favour of this amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It gives me a great deal of pleasure again to stand up in regard to Bill 1 and speak to the amendment from my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. It's one of those amendments that, you know, you do a lot of soul-searching on, and you understand where the member is coming from in regard to the amendment.

Then I look back at what we're trying to do. I think my colleague from Calgary-Shaw talked about the presumptiveness and what is covered under the legislation. We talk about emergency health care service providers, which, in my mind, trying to read through that particular language, could be a trauma nurse in a centre where they're trained to deal with traumas. When you're a trauma nurse or you're an ICU nurse or, for that matter, you're an RN – and I have relatives who are RNs and, in fact, have a sister-in-law who was an emergency nurse for many, many years and actually loved the job – you're trained for that particular job. To try and incorporate that, you have to think about what the nurse is trained for and what she is expected to see and do on that job. My colleague from Calgary-Shaw talked about the proof in regard to: if you suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder on the job, then it has to be proven. So I was thinking about this, and you can think about it many ways where, yes, a nurse could suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder.

I go back to when I was Solicitor General, Mr. Chair. I happened to be the Solicitor at the time when we had 9/11. I can tell you that I was two hours outside of Halifax when that tragic, tragic thing occurred. I was down three weeks after that at the 9/11 site, where they were still looking for bodies. I remember going down into the centre, with the firemen and all of the emergency medical people that were on-site digging for bodies, and hearing the compelling stories and seeing all the pictures all around the site that had been left by people looking for particular individuals.

I can't even imagine, after sitting down and talking to the CIA and the FBI and all of the emergency people that I talked to at 9/11, the crisis that they must have been dealing with at the time of the accident and at the site of the accident, when they were transporting thousands of people to emergency centres, to churches, and to halls body bag after body bag. You can see where you would have people who were emergency health service providers and where they would absolutely – there's no question – be dealing with some of the posttraumatic stress that this bill is going to include and that, I would imagine, would easily be covered under Bill 1.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to say as the former children's services minister that I was honoured to be that minister at that time, and I was honoured, quite frankly, to have all of the social workers that worked in the department with me and for me and the incredible job that they did day in and day out in dealing with some very, very difficult situations trying to serve families and children that were in troubled times. We put together a CARRT team, which is a crisis team, and we partnered a social worker with a police office. Many times while you're driving down 107th Street, you'll see a police car parked outside, and you've probably wondered: what's a police car doing there? Well, they're part and parcel of the CARRT team, which gets called out under, obviously, some horrific situations. Or you could see a social worker, even though they're trained, entering a crisis situation.

But all of this has to be proven. Every single one of the people that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is trying to incorporate into this particular piece of legislation will be covered if they can prove that they are suffering from posttraumatic stress under their

particular job. Mr. Chair, as much as I think that this is a good amendment, I think that there are times when you have to start backing off and you have to say: "Look. You know what? This has to be proven." I've used a couple of examples, you know. And it's up to the individual who's working in the job to prove that they're suffering posttraumatic stress disorder on the job. So I, unfortunately, will not be supporting this particular amendment.

Of course, once the bill is proclaimed is when you find out whether it's working or not. That's when you start hearing about what is working in the bill and what isn't working. If we're all of a sudden getting bombarded like we have in the past with WCB claims and the job that the WCB isn't doing, I think that will certainly alert us.

The government has made it very clear that this bill is their number one in this Legislative Assembly. So there is nothing that will stop the government from bringing this bill back because they're famous for bringing bills back when they're flawed. We can then look at incorporating what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is recommending.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others that wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief. I don't want to be repeating some of what I have said before. I guess I have serious concerns that this Legislature is about to create laws that identify specific professions as having preferential access to a diagnosis and a treatment and a compensation package. At the same time, we are acknowledging implicitly that the process in place isn't working, and somehow we're going to fix the process that isn't working quite well by a law that would identify some people preferentially over others. So I want to register a deep concern that while this is well intentioned, we're heading down the wrong path.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others that wish to speak? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

5:10

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the previous amendment we talked about the correctional officers and about the role that they play in day-to-day life. In day-to-day life the average social worker and these types of professions have the ability to call in a professional of a different nature to deal with very traumatic situations.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talked about the CARRT team and that in exceptional circumstances our social workers are out there with a team of police officers or professionals that deal with this kind of trauma every day, and they're working in tandem with those types of professionals. I think it's important to understand that if the situation goes badly, as sometimes it does, then that person is able to take a step back and actually let the RCMP or the police service or whomever do that job that they need to do, that first responder type of duty.

Social workers as a whole are very, very important, and we know that every day they are dealing with very traumatic and sensitive family situations, often having to take children from their home, dealing with parents that aren't responsible, unfortunately, or in very difficult circumstances. While that is traumatic, they do have coverage. What it's allowing them to do is – they will still be

covered. If they have an event that they go through, then they just have to prove that that event actually occurred during work.

Nobody is taking coverage away from a certain group of people. We're just making sure that those who have to deal with trauma on a day-to-day basis, on a regular occasion, in a very negative work field are getting the presumptive nature that's in place so that they don't actually have to prove that it was one single event. It might have been a series of events, or it could have been a single event. In this case, these types of workers, who could probably identify one single event or even a series of events, are able to come forward and make the case as to why their employment created a PTSD situation.

There is not a single person in this room that wants to deny any Albertan coverage and certainly not any employee, but we need to make sure going forward that for every employee, for their job description, we make sure their coverage is appropriate for them and ensure that our social workers have the ability to do their job. That's really, really important.

The difference between this amendment and the previous amendment is that the previous amendment was actually putting that first responder, basically, right in the line of fire and essentially saying: "Okay. That person has to deal with the trauma every single day." A sheriff pulls up to an accident and sees a multitude of dead bodies, and he has to deal with that. The average worker of this type doesn't necessarily have to do that.

It's really important that we keep a perspective on this and that we make sure going forward that we're not taking the presumptive nature and applying it to every single profession. How is that profession any different from anyone else? All of these things are traumatic as well: a teacher who sees a child going through traumatic things, a parent who watches their child die of cancer, you know, a parent who is volunteering – it's a slippery slope. So then what ends up happening is that we start assuming that everybody has to have the presumptive nature of coverage, which creates a problem. We need to make sure that the people are responsible and doing their jobs appropriately, but we also need to make sure that that presumptive nature only applies to first responders in very traumatic situations.

For that reason, I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others that would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I'm listening to the various debates that have taken place on this side of the House and on the other side of the House, I think we're getting sort of off track in the sense that in order for this bill to even come into effect, somebody has to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. This is just about the presumption that it is as a direct result of this employment. That's it.

Now, one of the things that I think has been missing in this debate is the issue of dealing with the WCB and how traumatic that can be for anybody who has ever dealt with the WCB. That is the elephant in the room. I cannot speak for any other MLA in here and their constituency office, but I can tell you that in my constituency 60, 70 per cent of people who come to my office have an issue with the WCB. Some of these people will walk into my office, and they will have volumes, binders of medical records and situations, and it goes on and on and on. It is overwhelming, to say the least. Overwhelming.

Initially I was not in favour of this motion. I'm not there yet, but clearly, in listening to the debates and some of the clarification

coming from the other side of the House, these are people who have already been diagnosed, so that's not a question here now. They have been diagnosed with this disorder. The question is: do they now have to battle with the WCB to make sure that they have their other issues taken care of? I can tell you: boy, I wish this bill was 300 pages long to do a whole lot of work with the WCB, because they are a disaster.

That's my statement. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others that wish to comment on this amendment?

Seeing none, then I call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

For the motion:

Anglin	Blakeman	Swann
Bilous	Notley	

Against the motion:

Allen	Goudreau	Pedersen
Anderson	Griffiths	Quadri
Barnes	Hale	Quest
Bhardwaj	Hancock	Rowe
Bikman	Horner	Sarich
Brown	Hughes	Scott
Campbell	Jeneroux	Smith
Casey	Johnson, L.	Starke
Cusanelli	Khan	Stier
Dallas	Kubinec	Strankman
DeLong	Luan	Towle
Donovan	McAllister	VanderBurg
Drysdale	McDonald	Weadick
Fenske	Olesen	Webber
Forsyth	Olson	Wilson
Fraser	Pastoor	Xiao
Fritz		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 49
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Now back to the bill. Other speakers on the bill? Ms Notley – my apologies, hon. members. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

5:30

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will say that I've never quite understood the rationale for that rule. I was never quite sure why I should be so shocked and appalled, so apology accepted. [interjection] What was that?

Ms Blakeman: By naming you, they can have you removed.

Ms Notley: Oh, I'm told that historically by naming me they can have me removed, which is quite true. There is a naming in the rules. That would probably be convenient for everybody in terms of moving more quickly today, but sorry.

I have one more amendment that I would like to propose to the Legislature in this Assembly as it relates to the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012, Bill 1. I will hand those

over to the pages and sit for a moment while they are being distributed, and then I'll explain what it is that I'm trying to achieve.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, we will refer to this amendment as A3, and I believe they've just about been delivered.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to speak to the amendment.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A quick summary of what it is that we're attempting to do with this amendment. First of all, what it says is that the bill be amended in section 2 in the proposed section 24.2 by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) If a worker who is or has been employed in an occupation that from time to time exposes the worker to traumatic events or a series of traumatic events is diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder by a physician or psychologist, and experienced a traumatic event or series of traumatic events, the post-traumatic stress disorder shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proven, to be an injury that arose out of and occurred during the course of the worker's employment in response to a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events to which the worker was exposed in carrying out the worker's duties in his or her occupation.

The intention of this amendment is basically to address the rather pithy, I thought, outline of a concern that was offered up by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. It is what I would suggest is a bit of a compromise amendment. What it's attempting to do is to create a middle level of test for compensability. It's a halfway level of test. What we've heard from a number of members, at least on this side of the House from all three parties, is that we're all very acutely aware that the Workers' Compensation Board does not function in the way we would like it to – there is a fairly broad understanding amongst injured workers that it's pretty hard to get a fair shake out of the Workers' Compensation Board – and that, really, what we would love to be doing is reforming the system as a whole. So what this amendment tries to do is: it tries to create a mid-level test.

There are currently if this bill passes two tests. The first one is the one where, if we go back to my example of the social worker and the police officer, who were helpfully described by the Wildrose member from Fish Creek as the CARRT team, you've got your social worker and you've got your police officer and they go together to deal with, you know, an acute event with respect to a domestic issue. They both go in to try and deal with it.

What happens right now if this amendment doesn't pass is that there are two tests. The police officer would just enjoy the benefit of the presumption, the end, and they would get compensation should they develop PTSD. The social worker, as I discussed before, because the onus is on her to prove the PTSD and that the particular traumatic event is what caused the PTSD, therefore needs to withstand repeated efforts on the part of the WCB to uncover every other potential element in her life that could actually be the contributing factor to the PTSD. As I say, that process itself can be generative of PTSD. Nonetheless, those are the two tests. What will invariably happen is that the social worker will not be covered and the police officer will be, yet they're both suffering an illness as a result of the same event.

What this is attempting to do is create a different test. What it's saying is: first of all, are you in an occupation that from time to time compels you to be in a situation where you're exposed to a traumatic event because of the nature of your work, and have you been diagnosed with PTSD? So if we were talking about the firefighter or the police officer, that's where it stops. That's where

the questions stop. That's where the onus to prove stops. If you can say yes to those two things, boom, you're covered. What we're saying here is that we're going to add a third test, and the third test is: can you specifically point to a traumatic event which occurred to you or to which you were exposed or a series of traumatic events to which you were exposed in your workplace? If you can meet that third test, then you get the benefit of the presumption.

Then what you're able to do is avoid that process of having the WCB dig through your life for the last 20 years to come up with all of the different explanations for why – well, actually, you drink too much, and you've had two failed marriages, and yada, yada, yada – and all the kinds of things that they will rely on to say that, no, this isn't PTSD, and, no, it wasn't related to this thing that happened at work. It's because you're a shitty person. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. You're not a good person, and therefore you are not entitled to PTSD. That's the examination that typically the WCB goes through now.

So what happens is that the person has to meet three tests, and if they meet those three tests, then the onus shifts to their benefit. Then it's a little bit harder for the WCB to simply say that it's because you drink too much or your family didn't get along well when you were a kid or you went through a traumatic divorce and yada, yada, yada. It's not enough for them simply to point to those things to say that's why you shouldn't get coverage because now the presumption is that it's the traumatic event or series of traumatic events at work that actually is driving the diagnosis of PTSD.

This is a halfway point. It's not as easy for that social worker that I described at the beginning to get the coverage that the firefighter or the police officer gets, but it is easier for that social worker to get the coverage and the benefits than is currently the case because currently it's very, very difficult for them to get those benefits. What we're trying to do with this piece of legislation is come up with a compromise attempt to deal with what is an epidemic across the country, to deal with a diagnosis which is constantly underidentified and undercompensated. Whether we're talking about Alberta workplaces or whether we're talking about our military service or wherever we're talking about it, we know that this is a huge issue which, essentially, goes unaddressed and is unfairly treated.

This is our attempt to come up with a reasonable halfway point. It attempts to get at as well the significant point made by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View that we are at least to some extent getting away from picking winners and losers on the basis of your actual title. Instead, we're giving due deference to the significance of trauma in the workplace and the relationship to PTSD while at the same time dealing with it on an individualized basis and looking at the actual experience of people and doing it in a way that prevents the WCB from conducting itself in the way it has in the past.

5:40

I think it was a really important point that was made – I'm not sure exactly who made it – that the decision of this government to create the presumption for our first responders as a means of thanking them does implicitly very clearly represent an admission by this government that the system is not working very well for those first responders now and that the mechanism of compensating for PTSD is broken. This is an effort to fix it in a less dramatic way for everybody else as well. It's an effort to bring and inject some level of equality into how we're addressing this issue.

I hope members will give some thought to this amendment and will consider supporting it in the spirit of compromise and good governance and coming up with the best outcomes for the greatest number of Albertans.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise in support of this, having said something about these issues in the past. As is often the case in the House, one is struck by the ironies that confront us in this work, and maybe the word is even "contradictions."

In the House today we again have two farm workers, Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, who represent a major occupational group in the province who are not fighting for preferential access to WCB. They're not even fighting to see their particular occupation group, farm workers, deal with PTSD. They simply want WCB. They have been excluded from any access to WCB. Our food producers: no mandatory requirement for farm workers to have WCB. There is the correct phrase. Any commercial employer who has paid farm workers has the option of whether to provide compensation for injury or death in this province.

We are today talking about accelerating access for a particular group of professions in Alberta who are finding it difficult to get appropriate, timely, effective WCB coverage, and we're ignoring a whole group of people, thousands and thousands of workers who produce our food every day and who don't have guaranteed access to any compensation, who don't live within the context of occupational health and safety standards, who aren't even under the labour code in this province in 2012. I won't go on and on because we're dealing with an amendment, but I couldn't help, Mr. Chairman, but comment on the 10 years of dedicated work that these volunteer folks have done in farm working, raising the awareness for us as legislators and Albertans generally of this huge anomaly that our most critical food producers are not covered by this very service that we are now enhancing for some in our society.

Mr. Chairman, I will be supporting this amendment at the same time as I recognize that once again we are trying to fix a system, WCB, which works in some ways in some areas but is clearly deficient in the area of PTSD in terms of timely access, appropriate treatment, and identifying the supports that people need when they're exposed to serious traumatic events arising out of the workplace and are not coping well.

It's not the appropriate way to fix the problem in a Legislature. I will again raise the question for the members to consider: whether discriminating under the law those particular occupational groups that should get preferential access to support and compensation and treatment is the role of the Legislature. It's a nice gesture; it's simply not the role of the Legislature.

Let's go back to the WCB and ask them to look at this particular area, which is a problem. And I recognize it is a problem. Some of our most vital first responders are not getting the services they need. But let's not burden the WCB or complicate our employment standards and care in this province by deciding for them how to manage a particular occupational condition called PTSD.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak on behalf of this amendment and the fact that I won't be supporting it. I appreciate where the hon. member is coming from; however, I think this amendment is so broad in nature. It essentially covers every single worker who may have ever had entanglement in some traumatic event at any point in time in their work history, and in reality that's not realistic.

You know, as a person who was a farmer – my husband and I owned a turkey farm. We were farmers, and we were a corporation, a full-blown corporation. We were incorporated. There were two of us. Yes, our three-year-old daughter all the way up until the age of eight helped us out on our farm. This is what family farms do. Not only that. My father-in-law is a big, huge dairy farmer, milks over 220 cows; again, a corporation; again, a family farm. His daughter farms; his son-in-law farms. Every once in a while we go over and help, and my sister-in-law's five children assist in that family farm operation.

There's one thing that's forgotten here. Most of these family farm operations, which are nasty little corporations – I understand that – do this because we're building a lifestyle. Part of the reason, and I experienced it myself, that we're building that lifestyle is because we want our children to grow food for Albertans, and most of us do that in a very safe and effective manner. I don't believe for a second that there's a single farmer out there that is purposely putting their employees in dangerous situations, not covering them with WCB, and purposely hoping that at some point in time they'll be injured just so they don't have to cover them. That's not the case.

I think we need to take away this whole idea on the left that all of a sudden every farmer in this province is bad, bad, bad because they're incorporated and they're doing things with their children. I personally find it offensive that we continuously hear this. They're owning a business and teaching their children about morals, values, and good work ethics. My little girl for five years helped us; my little girl called turkeys. Now, hey, the people in my town thought that it was cruel to call a turkey. But do you know one thing that my little girl does understand? My 10-year-old little girl understands when I tell her: don't run across the street in traffic; you will die. She understands exactly what that means.

If you start imposing WCB regulations on family farms, you will darn well put them out of business. It's about time that people on the left understood what our farms do for our people and what they bring to this province. This is absolutely ridiculous. In this case we're talking about family farms, but it's not limited to family farms. What about the restaurants that bring in students? We hire them at 12 years old. I was one of those students growing up. At 12 years old I went in and washed some dishes, got some good morals and good ethics, and went forward. Today I'm a hard-working Albertan giving back to Alberta.

I'm absolutely in favour of protecting those that need to be covered. We absolutely need to protect those people who are in traumatic situations on a daily basis and those people who need to be covered by WCB and need to have that presumptive nature removed and also have proven or have the presumptive nature removed so that if they have WCB, they have proper coverage and they have the proper clinicians to help them. There's no question about that. But we need to stop turning this argument into: let's go bad on those big, bad farm corporations; they're out to hurt everybody. It's about time somebody started standing up for the farmers of this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

5:50

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really like it when the passion in this House rises to a certain level. I will tell you this: their whip may be bigger, but I'd bet on my whip any day of the week.

I actually talked myself into supporting that last motion mainly because it was specific in nature.

An Hon. Member: Do you regret it?

Mr. Anglin: I do not regret it, sir.

When I look at the problem here, the reason this piece of legislation is required – and it is a good piece of legislation – is because we have this giant elephant in the room called the WCB, which has been a headache, I think, to most MLAs, after I heard a few conversations. That's problematic. That's problematic.

I would agree that this amendment is so broad in nature. There are situations where the WCB does not belong. It would be penalizing certain small businesses. I could not accept that in my riding, particularly on the family farms. My riding is all family farms. I shouldn't say I don't have any corporate entities, but I have very few in nature.

Where I am on this bill is quite simply this. It's troubling that we have to debate this legislation because we're not fixing the real problem. The problem is what the WCB does to these workers, particularly after they're diagnosed. If any of you walked over to the WCB building, what you'll find is that you're walking into almost an armed fortress because of some recent events where people have gotten so frustrated that they've gone into the building armed. That is something that has never actually been addressed as to what caused that problem and what we need to do to fix that problem.

So this in my mind is a Band-Aid attempt to fix what is a much larger problem, which is where the WCB belongs and how it should function. What we've done is just for the first responders, which I think I have nothing but admiration for. The presumption of their disorder is now going to be legislated. That's ironic in many ways when you think about it in those terms.

I don't think I'm going to be supporting this because of its broad nature, but I would encourage the other side to think about actually fixing the WCB. Thank you.

Ms. Notley: I'll be very brief, but I do just want to clarify. A couple of speakers have spoken about this being too broad. You need to understand that this is not an attempt to broaden the presumption or the benefits that are otherwise provided through Bill 1 to a great big group of people. What we're doing is providing a lesser benefit to a great big group of people. There's a great, fabulous benefit that's being provided to a very narrow group of people, and we've talked most of this afternoon about the people that are being excluded from that great, fabulous benefit.

What this is an attempt to provide a lesser benefit but still one which is better than the horrific benefit that I would suggest currently exists for the vast majority of Alberta workers who are, unfortunately, through tragedy forced to claim for PTSD under our current workers' compensation system. Do understand, Members, that the language would not extend the Bill 1 presumption to all the people that are described. Rather, it would just attempt to ameliorate the difficulty that is experienced by those who are not covered by the Bill 1 presumption. That's what I'm trying to do.

That's all I have to say on it, and I thank you for your consideration.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers?

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Chair, I would like to give the hon. member a chance to try to convince me. I don't understand this lesser benefit. If she wouldn't mind elaborating on it, I will listen.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As quickly as I can, the benefit that is being provided to first responders through this legislation is that if you are a first responder that's described, all you have to show to the WCB is that you're diagnosed with PTSD and that you fit this occupation. That's where the inquiry ends. You get your compensation.

What this would do is it would say that you're in an occupation that's quite widely described – you've quite correctly described that – and you're diagnosed with PTSD and you can show that you were exposed to a particular traumatic event or particular series of traumatic events in your work, and then you get the benefit of the presumption. So it's not the case that we're saying that if you happen to be a social worker who spends most of your time educating people in the office, dealing with files, but if you are a social worker who was the one that I described previously, who was exposed to a very traumatic incident, then you would get the presumption but only then. So it adds another test. You have to show that there was a traumatic incident. Then you get the presumption.

Right now even if you show there was that traumatic incident, the WCB still has the presumption and you have to show all this evidence to balance the probabilities in your own favour. That is what allows the WCB to do this intrusive investigation of your whole life in order to disprove that claim. I'm attempting to mitigate the opportunity for the WCB to engage in that intrusive

investigation, which undermines so many claims and ultimately reinjures people in many cases.

I hope that's clearer.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other comments?

I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Any other questions or comments on the bill? We still have some time. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly appreciate the debate and the discussion that we've had around this bill today. I think it's been engaging. I, too, have a couple of amendments that I would like to propose. The first one is here, the requisite number of copies, and I will speak to it.

An Hon. Member: After they hand these out.

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

The Chair: We have an amendment before us, hon. members. This amendment will be A4. We'll wait for the amendment to be distributed. By then it'll probably be time to adjourn until 7:30.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to stand and bring forward the first amendment that I have brought to this House. I look forward to an engaging debate.

Mr. Chair, the House leader from the Official Opposition has suggested that I move for adjournment until 7:30 at this time.

The Chair: No. Just carry on. I'll manage the clock. Thank you.

Hon. members, it appears to be 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the Committee of the Whole is recessed until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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